

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

WHAT WORKS WHEN

A Guide for Education Leaders



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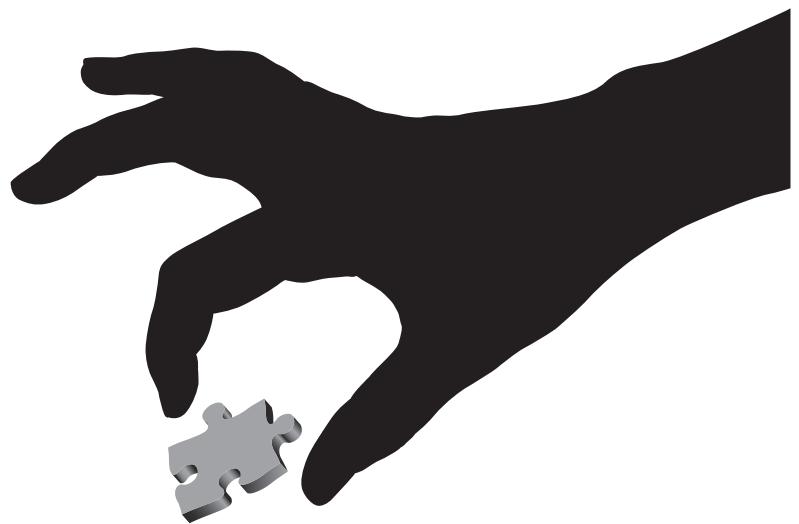
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Chapter 1



Introduction

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Introduction

Studies of high-performing schools, where all students learn more than similar students in other schools, show common design elements. These elements are comprehensive, affecting the whole school, and include:

- Clear mission guiding daily activities
- High, unyielding expectations that all students will learn
- Frequent monitoring of student progress
- Responsive approaches for struggling students
- Current, researched-based instructional techniques
- Uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects
- Safe and orderly environment
- Strong home-school connection
- Strong leadership and management practices

In chronically struggling schools—schools where most students or very large subgroups of students are failing—many of these elements typically are missing. In many cases, it is not a matter of not knowing about them, but rather one of not implementing them.

The purpose of this guide is to help chronically struggling schools restructure. Restructuring means making major, rapid changes that affect how a school is led and how instruction is delivered. Restructuring is essential in achieving rapid, dramatic improvements in student learning. The focus is on helping education leaders choose strategies that result in rapid improvement, even when complete

culture change to sustain that improvement may take upward of three years.

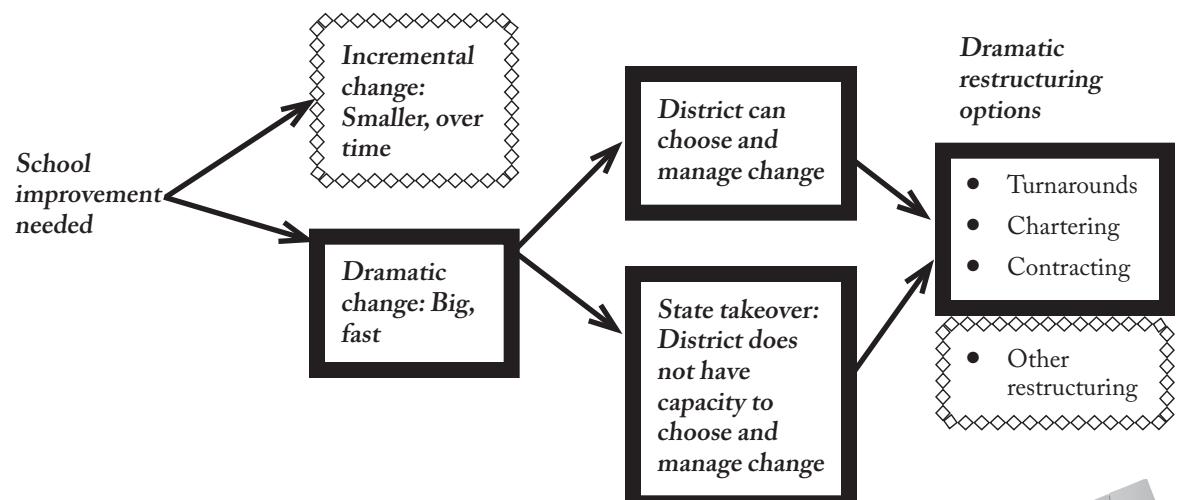
This guide assumes that schools facing restructuring are, for the most part, experiencing systematic shortcomings in their ability to educate students. Few have gained this label because of a technicality or measurement issue. Rather, these are schools in need of dramatic change.

The text box, “Choosing a Change Strategy: Focus of this Guide,” shows the elements featured in this guide, which focuses on choosing one of the following restructuring options:

- Reopening as a charter school
- Turnarounds with new leaders and staff
- Contracting with external education management providers

State takeovers of schools are addressed as an option; however, the guide does not provide a detailed description of how to implement this option. State takeovers are addressed early in the guide, in the context of helping districts determine whether they have the capacity to manage the restructuring decision process; and again later, when districts may consider state takeovers of selected schools. As the text box shows, the guide does not address incremental change that is needed when an already strong school wants to make smaller, continuing improvements over time. The guide also does not address hybrids of chartering, contracting, and district-managed turnarounds—although it does provide useful information that may be helpful to districts that are considering these approaches. [Note: These hybrids may fall under Option 5 of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.]

Choosing a Change Strategy: Focus of this Guide



About the Guide

This guide reflects the best education and cross-industry research on restructuring for chronically struggling schools. That research was compiled by Public Impact, an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. For those of you interested in the research documents, you are directed to the following sources:

- *What Works When* series, available on the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement's website at www.centerforcsri.org
- Education Leaders' Summaries of the *What Works When* series papers, available in the Appendix of this guide
- Public Impact website at www.publicimpact.com

The guide translates research into practical decision-making tools that include process steps. It also offers a realistic consideration of strengths and constraints in a wide variety of school districts.

The guide may be used by any district or state choosing change strategies for schools where large, swift improvement is needed to meet students' academic needs. It also may be used by districts considering school restructuring to meet the requirements of NCLB (see the text box, "School Restructuring Under NCLB").

The guide is organized to support the restructuring process at each step. To this end, it is organized into the following sections. [Note: Tools are found at the end of each chapter.]

Section 1: Building Your Knowledge Base. This section provides a brief overview of restructuring along with information about four restructuring options for chronically struggling schools. It includes the following chapters:

- Understanding Restructuring
- Reopening as a Charter School
- Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff
- Contracting with External Education Management Providers
- State Takeovers of Schools

A thorough knowledge of restructuring and the various options is assumed in Section 2. If you are a school district restructuring under NCLB, the Appendix contains a further discussion of options.

Section 2: Engaging in the Restructuring Process. This section provides a step-by-step restructuring process, including tools that can be used to enhance the process. The tool, “Restructuring Roadmap,” (page 7) provides an overview of this section. The section includes the following chapters:

- **Step 1: Taking Charge of Change—Big Change.** This step includes organizing your district restructuring team, assessing your team and district capacity to govern restructuring decisions, deciding whether to invite a state takeover of the entire restructuring process, making a plan to include stakeholders, and preparing your completed district team to take further action.
- **Step 2: Choosing the Right Changes.** This step includes organizing your school-level decision-making process, conducting a school-by-school restructuring analysis, and making final restructuring decisions across the district.
- **Step 3: Implementing the Plan.** This step includes setting goals for implementation and identifying and tackling likely roadblocks to success. This guide is not a manual for implementation, but resources are listed to help with full implementation of each restructuring strategy.

- **Step 4: Evaluating, Improving, and Acting on Results.** This step provides a brief list of actions needed to improve future restructuring efforts.

Appendix: Readers seeking citations for the research underlying this guide should see summaries of the four papers on which it is based.

Throughout this guide are school, district, and state-level examples of successful restructuring efforts. These vignettes are denoted with the heading “A Look at Successful Restructuring.” They illustrate approaches to restructuring and highlight lessons learned as well as pitfalls to avoid when designing and implementing a restructuring process.

Moving Forward

The guide assumes that one individual will serve as the lead organizer. This individual will guide the restructuring team through the change process. Examples include:

- In a smaller district, the superintendent may lead the team.
- In a larger district, this might be a deputy or assistant superintendent or other senior person who is ready and able to organize a major change process.
- In some cases, a credible outsider who is familiar with the district schools may be the best choice.

In any case, strong team leadership skills are essential to keep the team motivated, informed, and productive through the challenging change process.

Individuals serving in the role of lead organizer are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the entire guide. The guide is design so that you may work through the process from start to finish or so that you may pull out tools or portions of text to use in a process of your own choosing. The tool, “Organizer’s Checklist,” (page 8) provides a list of tasks, should you decide to work through the process presented in the guide.

School Restructuring Under NCLB

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few children learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the percentage of children meeting grade-level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. During the 2008-2009 school year it is estimated that 3,558 U.S. public schools are in the restructuring phase of NCLB; another 1,771 schools are planning for restructuring in 2009-2010 if they fall short of AYP (Hoff, 2008).

All five restructuring options are called alternative governance arrangements in the law, and thus are intended to change how failing schools are led and controlled. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- **Chartering:** closing and reopening as a public charter school.
- **Turnarounds:** replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure.
- **Contracting:** working with an outside entity to operate the school.
- **State takeovers:** turning the school operations over to the state education agency.
- **Other:** engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms.

The Appendix in this guide contains a discussion of the first four options as they pertain to NCLB. States and districts using hybrids of the first three options also will find these resources helpful.

Once a district is notified that a school has not met AYP for a fifth consecutive year, the district has the sixth year to plan a restructuring strategy for the school. If the school does not make AYP at the end of the planning year, then the restructuring plan must be implemented in the seventh year. When test results are available early at the end of Year 5, districts can get a jump on restructuring planning. This allows more time for choosing and planning a restructuring option that is likely to work for each school.

Schools With Small Subgroups That Fail Under NCLB

Some schools fail under NCLB when they do not address the learning needs of a small subgroup of children. Dramatic change may need to occur throughout the school when the subgroup failure is just a symptom of overall school shortcomings. For example, some schools unintentionally lower expectations for children who are disadvantaged in any way; only one subgroup may fail to make AYP, but other subgroups also may benefit from more challenging goals and coursework. In other cases, the school can make very specific changes to meet the particular needs of a group of children without whole-school restructuring. The right solution always starts with an understanding of what failing students specifically need to succeed—and what the school should do to meet that need.

Reference

Hoff, D.J. (2008, December 19). Schools struggling to meet key goal on accountability. *Education Week*. Retrieved December 23, 2008, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/12/18/16ayp.h28.html?qs=AYP>



TOOL



Restructuring Roadmap

| | Step 1. Taking Charge of Change—Big Change | Step 2. Choosing the Right Changes | Step 3. Implementing the Plan | Step 4. Evaluating, Improving, and Acting on Results |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| What It Includes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing the district team Assessing the team and district capacity Deciding whether to invite state takeover Making a plan to include stakeholders Preparing for future action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning the analysis and decision process Analyzing school failure Considering turnarounds, chartering, and contracting Making final restructuring decisions across a district (and reconsidering state takeover) | <p>After approval by your school board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting goals for implementation: How much improvement is expected, and how fast, in each school? Removing implementation roadblocks Using resources for implementation Implementing your restructuring plan(s) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating success—is improved enough? Improving schools ready for incremental change; replicating successes in future decisions Acting on results: Back to Step 1 for schools not improved enough to be ready for incremental change |
| Who Is Involved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District team (Possibly state team) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District team School teams Other stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District team School teams School leaders Charters or contractors Stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District team School teams |
| When (ideally) | 15–18 months before restructured school begins | 12–15 months before restructured school begins | 9–12 months before restructured school begins | 9 months after restructured school begins |



Organizer's Checklist

This checklist is primarily for the lead organizer of the district restructuring process. In a smaller district, this might be the superintendent. In a larger district, this might be a deputy or assistant superintendent or other senior person who is ready and able to organize a major change process. In some cases, the organizer may be a credible outsider.

Step 1: Taking Charge of Change—Big Change

Get Started

- Decide who will be on the initial district restructuring team.
- Assess your district's capacity to restructure low-performing schools directly.
- Invite your state to take over the restructuring process if needed.

Plan Stakeholder Roles

- Make a plan to include stakeholders in choosing school restructuring strategies.
- Invite/notify stakeholders to participate as decided; make additions to district restructuring team first, as decided.

Prepare for Further Action

- Determine leadership and roles on the district restructuring team.
- Determine whether/which external experts and facilitators are needed.
- Determine process for the district restructuring team.
- Create a standing agenda for district restructuring team meetings.

Continued



Organizer's Checklist (continuation)

Step 2: Choosing the Right Changes

Plan the Process

- Decide when and how the district team will determine what restructuring options are feasible within the district.
- Decide who will analyze each individual school and recommend a restructuring strategy to the superintendent.
- Decide when and how the district team will review restructuring recommendations across the district before presenting to the school board.

Analyze Failure and Determine When Focused Changes May Work

- Determine whether the whole school needs restructuring.
- Determine which, if any, subgroups need major, focused changes.

Choose Among Chartering, Turnarounds, and Contracting

- Review the restructuring checklists on chartering, turnarounds, and contracting.
- Determine whether turnaround leaders are available for each school.
- Assess your district's capacity to support turnarounds.
- Assess your supply of good external school providers.
- Assess your district's capacity to charter and contract.
- Determine whether your state has a good charter law.
- Determine whether contracting is appropriate.

Continued



Organizer's Checklist (*continuation*)

Make Final Restructuring Decisions Across the District (District Team)

- Review detailed requirements for success for each recommended strategy.
- Assess your district's capacity to support the recommended restructuring strategies across the district.
- Reconsider state takeover for schools that do not have the capacity to restructure.
- Articulate recommendations for each school, major reasons for choosing, and strategies for presenting recommendations to the school board.

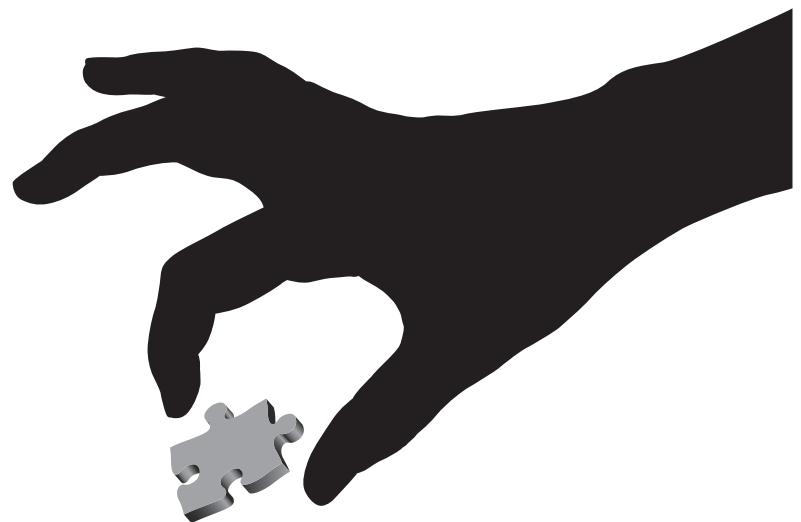
Step 3: Implementing the Plan

- Engage outside expertise for restructuring implementation if needed.
- Set implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines.
- Address implementation roadblocks as needed.
- Utilize resources to implement each restructuring strategy.

Step 4: Evaluating, Improving, and Acting on Results

- Engage outside evaluation expertise if needed.
- Use the goals, including improvement targets and timelines, that you established during implementation.
- Clarify who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data.
- Consider restructuring again in schools that have not shown substantial improvement.
- Use evaluation findings to make better restructuring decisions in the future.

Chapter 2



Understanding Restructuring

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Understanding Restructuring

Restructuring means different things to different people. To some, it means making any important change, big or small. However, in a school where many students are not learning enough, successful restructuring must result in significantly better learning—fast.

Restructuring is defined in this guide as changes in the very *structure* of an organization. This includes changes in who makes decisions and how they make them. In failing organizations—ones that need to make big improvements fast—changing who provides authoritative direction and control is nearly always a critical first step.

In failing schools that make dramatic improvements, changes in governance and leadership are intended to produce changes in how teachers teach and how children learn. But the starting point is always a major change in who has authority and control in the school and how that authority and control is used. If done appropriately, changing leadership and control of a school can enable capable teachers to achieve better learning results.

This type of structural change differs from changes made solely to a school’s curriculum, instruction, or professional environment—or even to a combination of changes in these areas. Such changes work very well in a school that is already satisfactory, where the goal is to improve service to students who are already well served. In fact, most schools that are attempting to restructure have opted for smaller changes, such as professional development

for existing leaders and staff, new reading or math curricula, instructional method changes, reduced class or school size, team teaching, or a collection of these changes. These reforms generally do not change governance—or who has authority for direction and control of a school. Failing schools more often than not find it difficult to achieve desired results with these smaller changes, even when they try very hard. This is consistent with the experiences of failing organizations across industries, even when funding is abundant.

There are other ways to make big changes. But this casting of governance as essential to successful restructuring is well supported by research. [Note: Readers who are interested in the research base are encouraged to review the *What Works When Education Leaders’ Summaries* in the Appendix of this guide. For the complete report, including citations, visit the Learning Point Associates website at www.centerforcsri.org.]

Characteristics That Affect Restructuring Success

There are many lessons from the prior experiences of schools and analogous organizations that have made—or failed to make—dramatic, speedy improvements. Lessons are organized into four broad categories that describe characteristics of people, organizations, and policies that affect success. Changing or influencing each of these can be criti-

cal for making dramatic improvements in a school. They are:

- **Governance.** This is the selection and management of each school's leaders (or the boards or groups that manage them) and policies affecting multiple schools, both during and after the change process.
- **Leadership.** This is the leadership of each individual school.
- **Environment.** These are factors that are at least partially outside the control of the school and district. Knowing them in advance allows the district to exert more of the right influence on external factors.
- **Organization.** These are the practices and characteristics of each school as an organization.

These categories are core to each of the restructuring options presented in this guide. Analysis of these characteristics will help you ensure success. The different restructuring options are described in the following chapters. Each discussion highlights considerations in these four categories. You are encouraged to read through these descriptions—as well as the summaries in the Appendix—to help your team govern the process more effectively.

Big Lessons About Restructuring

Big Lesson 1: Big, fast improvements are different from incremental changes over time.

Strategies that work to create big change are more similar to each other than expected—and quite a bit different from strategies typically used to improve organizations that are already working well. Most notably, successful, large improvements are preceded by a change in the direction and control—and how that direction and control is used. This means getting the right leader in each school and the right oversight by the district or outsiders

chosen by the district. The right leader can affect enormous improvements no matter how low the odds of success. However, replicating and sustaining large improvements appears unlikely without major, districtwide governance changes.

Big Lesson 2: Eliminating low-performing schools is not a one-time project; it is a commitment that is a core part of district work.

Even the most effective, dramatic restructuring strategies—the ones that work when nothing else has—sometimes fail. Thus, the same organizations must sometimes undergo repeated restructuring to achieve desired success. For example, roughly 70 percent of turnaround efforts—those aimed at turning bad organizations to great ones from within—fail across industries (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 1995). In the private sector, where success and failure rates are relatively simple to measure, investors expect roughly 20 percent of start-up organizations to fail and another 60 percent to bump along with mediocre performance; only 20 percent are very successful (Christensen & Raynor, 2003). Yet these two strategies—turnarounds and fresh starts—are the only two that cross-organization research and school experience have shown work for replacing very low performance with very high performance.

Cross-industry surveys of top managers indicate that regular, major restructuring is an expectation in highly competitive, achievement-oriented industries (Kanter, 1991). Districts that want to eliminate low-performing schools and replace them with significantly higher performing ones might want to adopt the same expectation. Major restructuring will be a regular event, not a one-time activity, for districts that serve large numbers of disadvantaged children and succeed in having no chronically bad schools.

With each round of restructuring some schools will improve dramatically, others will improve a great deal but not quite enough, and others will continue to fail. Many districts have become adept at helping relatively strong schools make continued, incremental improvements over time—a good strategy for schools that improve a great deal after restructuring.

But what about chronically struggling schools? District leaders must set clear performance goals and commit to identifying and promptly addressing continued failure. Additional restructuring attempts in these schools will be essential (e.g., introducing a new turnaround leader, changing charter or contract providers, or choosing another restructuring option entirely). Creating a pipeline of promising turnaround leaders and contract or charter providers may be a necessary companion activity for long-term elimination of very low-performing schools.

Knowing what has made other similar efforts a success or failure—chronicled in the *What Works When* series and condensed in this guide for practical action—will help you choose and initiate major change more successfully. Nonetheless, districts embarking on restructuring should prepare to support schools that succeed and reintroduce restructuring in those that do not.

Big Lesson 3: District leaders who possess a steely will and a compass set firmly on student learning will have a better chance of eliminating low-performing schools.

This is essential to leading a sustained restructuring process that includes the necessary changes in school governance and leadership. All such changes have the potential to create firestorms among stakeholders—from community members, to parents, to traditional interest groups—with regard for the potential benefit to children. It is crucial to include stakeholders in the process without letting them divert it from success.

How Dramatic Improvement Happens: Common How-to Lessons

Strategies that produce large, fast improvements are similar in many ways. Some common lessons about how to create restructuring success include:

- Providing governance of the restructuring process and restructured schools is an essential ingredient at the district (or state) level. Good governance ensures that all of the elements are addressed effectively and efficiently.
- Managing stakeholders—from teachers, to parents, to school boards, to grass roots organizations—is a key differentiator of successful efforts to make radical learning improvements in schools. Stakeholders can undermine a change effort without regard to the potential benefit for children in a school, and they can enable change when they support it.
- Creating the right environment for leaders of restructured schools will increase the number of successful leaders and schools significantly. The most critical environmental factors include:
 - Freedom to act differently with students who have not been successful learners. Schools that achieve learning with previously unsuccessful learners often make big changes that work for learning, even when they are inconvenient or uncomfortable. They do not let efficiency, consistency, prior relationships, staff preferences, parents, community wish lists, and/or political concerns take precedence over what is best for student learning.
 - Accountability that is clear, tracked frequently, and reported publicly. If measurement systems are lacking, improving them rather than failing to monitor them is the solution for success.
 - Time frames that allow plenty of time for planning changes but very short

timetables to demonstrate success in targeted grades and subjects. Successful big changes get results fast. Results should be clear after one school year, with large leaps in the percentage of students making grade level and progress made by those furthest behind. Speedy support of successful strategies and the quick elimination of failed strategies happen only when time frames are short. Even when work remains to improve learning in additional subjects and grades, there is little waiting and wondering whether the chosen change strategy will work.

- Support that helps without hijacking a school's freedom to do things differently with previously failing students. Financial, human resource, technical, data, and other service support from the district is critical, as is coordination among these functions when needed to allow deviations by a school that is restructuring. Help should be provided, with great care not to compromise changes that school leaders need to make (e.g., in the schedule, curriculum, teaching approach, monitoring of student progress).
- Choosing the right school leaders and managing them the right way is a critical step without which large improvements cannot happen. School leaders who are effective in restructured schools are different from leaders who are successful maintaining and improving already high-performing schools. Successful start-up school leaders resemble entrepreneurs, and successful turnaround leaders combine the characteristics of entrepreneurs and traditional principals. Identifying and nurturing leaders capable of leading successfully in the varied restructuring environments is clearly a need for the future. These leaders do not do everything themselves, however. They motivate teachers, other staff, students, and parents to higher levels of performance. They utilize the talents of staff, external consultants, and others to balance their own strengths and get the job done.
- Ensuring organizational practices, including:
 - Effective school practices. Schools where students learn more than similar students in other schools follow these consistently, and this has been well documented in the research.
 - Staffing. Teachers and other staff members who support change and implement effective school practices are essential. Whether culled from existing staff or hired from outside the existing school, staff members willing to do what works are critical.

Moving Forward

This chapter provided an overview of the restructuring process. It highlighted elements that are especially relevant to chronically struggling schools. In the next four chapters, you will learn about four restructuring options for chronically struggling schools. The information was drawn from the *What Works When* series available on the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement website. Familiarize yourself with the four options. A thorough understanding of each will enhance your effectiveness in working through the restructuring process discussed later in this guide.

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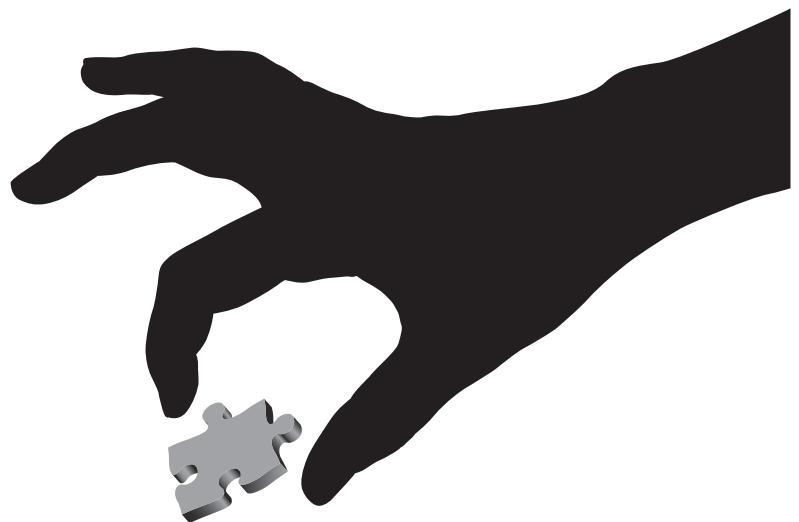
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Chapter 3



Reopening as a Charter School

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Reopening as a Charter School

Charter schools generally are autonomous public schools that receive a contract called a charter from a public entity such as a local school board, a public university, or a state board of education (see the text box, “Charter Facts,” for general information).

The entity giving the charter is called an authorizer. Charter schools are schools of choice, usually open to all students, and in all cases tuition free. Each charter describes the school’s goals, organization, funding, and autonomy. Charter schools eventually are expected to close if goals are not met, and closure terms are included in the charters. Most charter schools are nonprofits, but some are for-profit organizations.

The majority of charter schools in the United States are entirely new schools that are usually formed by a group of parents, teachers, or community members who start the school from scratch. An increasing number of these are part of charter management organizations (CMOs). [Note: The chartering option under NCLB allows a district to close a district school and reopen it with a clean slate under a charter agreement.] Chartering is distinct from closing and reopening a school that is still managed by the district. It also is distinguished from contracting, which is done without a state charter law prescribing contract terms.

Student Learning Results in Charter Schools

Global comparisons to other students statewide—the most common way scores are reported and

analyzed—are limited in meaning because of income and racial disparities between charter schools and other state schools. Not surprisingly then, statewide percent-at-grade-level comparisons at single points in time often show charter students lagging.

Studies comparing charter students to students in more directly comparable schools often show a higher percentage of charter students making grade level than district students on average. Studies analyzing change over time—focusing on the progress students or schools are making rather than the relative advantages students bring to school—tend to show charter schools and charter students making faster progress on average than district schools. However, average comparisons of any kind can be misleading. Some charter schools are very high performing while others are low performing. Thus, one role of districts that charter is to create more schools at the top and continually eliminate schools at the bottom.

Charter Start-ups, District School Conversions, and Noncharter Restarts

The majority of charter schools are start-ups that are unrelated to district schools. Very few are conversions or starting fresh charters—schools that replace low-performing district schools. Start fresh conversions have been or are being undertaken in some states and districts. In most cases, it is too soon to assess results.

Other districts have begun closing and reopening schools in noncharter fashion, providing more

freedom and accountability in a manner similar to that granted through charters. Prominent examples include Chicago and New York City.

Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

The following factors influence the success or failure of chartering:

- System-level governance
- Environment
- School-level governance
- School leadership
- Organization

The most influential factors are the charter authorizing roles at the system level, school governance, and school leadership. The district as authorizer has enormous control over all three of these factors as well as others. The goal is to design these elements effectively initially, as changing them later often poses difficult challenges. A description of each success factor follows.

System-Level Governance

Leadership and management of the entire chartering effort within a district are critical. The district acts as the process organizer and authorizer of reopened schools. The broad experience of charter authorizers nationally, not just district authorizers, provides a base of information about what works. The following factors contribute to authorizing success.

- **Rigorous selection process.** The district's goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success as quickly as possible with students who have not succeeded in the existing schools. Doing this requires the selection process to be:
 - **Fair.** The submission process is clear and realistic. It contains well-

Charter Facts

- The first charter school legislation in the United States was passed in 1991.
- Forty states and the District of Columbia have legislation authorizing charter schools.
- By fall 2005, there were roughly 3,600 charter schools serving more than 1 million students.
- Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of minority (58 percent versus 45 percent) and low-income (52 percent versus 40 percent) students than other public schools in the same states, but they are similar in makeup to the districts where they are located. Charter schools are disproportionately located in urban areas.



communicated timelines, format and content specifications, process steps, and evaluation criteria.

- **Rigorous.** Each applicant demonstrates a clear and compelling mission, an educational program based on research about school quality, a solid business plan, effective governance and management systems, and evidence that the applicant can carry out the plan successfully.
- **Designed to make good charter decisions.** The district thoroughly evaluates each application using reviewers who have educational, organizational, legal, and financial expertise.
- **Adequate resources.** Authorizing is labor intensive. Authorizers who devote staff and other resources exclusively to this function perform better than those who do not.
- **Community engagement.** Charter schools can be controversial. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders, while also

pressing forward with change, generally are the most successful.

- **Working environment.** Strong authorizers balance accountability for results, freedom of schools to do things differently, and adequate support when needed.

Districts may have more difficulty than other authorizers in devoting staff and resources to the authorizing function. Local district authorizers also may be more vulnerable to political pressure. Authorizers with broader geographic coverage typically use higher quality processes than do others.

Environment

Factors outside of a charter school's control may affect success. Examples include:

- **Freedom to act.** Freedom to try approaches different from current practice is a large factor in the success of efforts to meet previously unmet needs. It is a misconception that charter status grants a school automatic autonomy; this differs from state to state. Districts considering charters to restructure low-performing schools will want to note whether state charter laws allow charter schools to use additional practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students, such as longer school days and control over staff hiring.
- **Accountability.** Monitoring and evaluating results are key responsibilities of system-level governance that will affect charter school success. One element of accountability is establishing clear expectations for measurable results during specified time periods. Another key element is ongoing assessment—that is, teasing out achievement rates and accurately comparing numbers in a mobile student population is challenging but critical for accountability.

- **Timetable.** Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing providers who then need time to plan and organize each school. However, too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much. [Note: The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law.]
- **Additional support.** District authorizers must decide how much per-pupil funding, training, technical assistance, and facility assistance the district will provide to maximize charter school success.

School-Level Governance

Most charter schools are governed by a board of trustees to whom the authorizer grants the charter. A key role of the board is choosing the right school leader. The board is accountable for school performance. Success factors include:

- Common commitment to the school's mission
- Understanding of the charter goals and having a clear way to measure performance against those goals
- Commitment to ultimate learning results, clarity of board member roles, appropriate structure (size, composition, committees, officers)
- Board meeting process that focuses on strategy, governance (not day-to-day school management), and building a strong relationship with the school leader.

School Leadership

No research yet clarifies the capabilities of successful start-up and charter school leaders. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent

of performers to average performers has found strong similarities among start-up leaders in differing industries. Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include:

- Driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and persistence)
- Solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses)
- Showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses)
- Influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals)

The highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals), and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals).

Further research is needed to clarify what distinguishes the best charter school leaders. At the very least, look for proven entrepreneurial capability in charter leaders and charter boards that are capable of managing this kind of talent.

Organization

Although existing staff members tend not to be guaranteed jobs in the reopened school, a totally new staff may not be necessary. A mix of existing and new staff members may be optimal, but this will depend upon the specifics of the charter granted.

All staff, old and new, must agree with and act on the school's mission. Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. They include:

- Clear mission guiding daily activities
- High, unyielding expectations that all students will learn
- Frequent monitoring of student progress

- Responsive approaches for struggling students
- Knowledge of current research on teaching and learning
- Uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning
- Safe and orderly environment
- Strong home-school connection
- Strong leadership

Additional factors cited in one analysis of successful charters include flexibility to meet the mission, committed staff with relevant skills, a caring environment for staff and students, and internal accountability.

The tool, "Restructuring Checklist: Reopening as a Charter School," (page 27) lists the requirements of successful district-authorized charter schools. Familiarize yourself with the information, as it will be referred to in Step 2 of the restructuring process.

A Look at Successful Restructuring **King-Chavez Charter School**

In the fall of 2004, King Elementary School (San Diego) was failing its students. After years of stagnation and falling test scores, the school had entered restructuring status and needed to plan the best way forward. The local Chavez Academy of Excellence Charter Management Organization (CMO) reached out to King Elementary to restructure the school under its fledgling charter school model. The CMO's philosophical approach to education centered on the whole child, through programs focused on academics, athletics, and the arts. Having demonstrated the program's efficacy through its first school, Chavez's charter model promised rapid improvement in student performance at King.

For More Information

King-Chavez Charter School

General Sources

King-Chavez CMO history (http://kingchavez.net/T1_DSL/CMO/KChistoryKC.htm)

King-Chavez Primary Academy school accountability report card 05-06 (http://kingchavez.net/T1_DSL/Primary/SARC044short.pdf)

California 2007-08 accountability progress reports for King-Chavez Academies:

- Primary Academy (<http://api.cde.ca.gov/AcntRpt2008/2008GrowthSch.aspx?allcds=37683386040190>)
- Arts Academy (<http://api.cde.ca.gov/AcntRpt2008/2008GrowthSch.aspx?allcds=37683380109033>)
- Athletics Academy (<http://api.cde.ca.gov/AcntRpt2008/2008GrowthSch.aspx?allcds=37683380109041>)

News Articles

Sanchez, L. (2004, November 3). Failing school may get a helping hand. *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/education/20041103-9999-1m3king.html>

Gao, H. (2005, January 25). Struggling campuses plot course for reform. *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/education/20050125-9999-1m25restruct.html>



In 2005, King Elementary School restructured as three smaller charter schools under the King-Chavez model—King-Chavez Primary, King-Chavez Arts, and King-Chavez Athletics. King-Chavez Primary opened to serve students from Kindergarten

through the second grade, and the Arts and Athletics Academies both opened to students in third through fifth grade. King-Chavez schools aimed to build strong school spirit—a sense of belonging and community—in their schools to create an environment where students felt compelled to learn. Building on the legacies of their namesakes, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Caesar Chavez, the schools also encouraged involvement in the community and giving back through service.

The King-Chavez academies emphasized a core academic program centering on mathematics, literacy, and second-language education in a collaborative model that employs a co-teaching method and promotes small-group learning. This approach was designed to serve the schools' diverse student population, including students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and English language learners. The schools enriched the core academic program through arts, technology, and physical education courses, and they countered negative external forces—including the strong pull of local gangs—by incorporating a character development program into everyday classes.

According to state accountability measures, the King-Chavez academies have all improved in performance, although some have performed better than others. California's Academic Performance Index (API) measures school performance on a scale of 200-1000, with 800 as the target for all schools. In contrast to King Elementary School's 2005 API of 559, the King-Chavez Primary, Arts, and Athletics Academies earned 2007 API scores of 810, 641, and 739, respectively. The students continued to build on prior gains and all three schools exceeded growth targets for the 2007-08 school year. At the Primary Academy, students performing at or above proficiency grew from about 13 percent in 2005 to nearly 50 percent in 2007.

A Look at Successful Restructuring **Keiller Leadership Academy**

In January 2005, teachers and parents at Keiller Middle School in San Diego walked door-to-door to promote their chosen restructuring plan—charter conversion. Supporters needed half of the parents at the school to support the plan before the board would consider their petition. While gathering signatures, volunteers heard parent concerns about gang violence that had threatened their children's safety. Many parents had begun to send their children to schools elsewhere in the city to receive a quality education in a safe environment. Parents and teachers wanted safe and effective schools in their own community. For the principal, teachers, and parents seeking signatures, the freedoms that the charter option provided would allow them to offer just that.

After successfully petitioning the school board, Keiller Middle School became Keiller Leadership Academy (KLA) in the fall of 2005. As a charter school, KLA served 200 fewer students than before, although it continued to serve youth from economically disadvantaged families. KLA's principal used the new freedoms allowed in a charter school to undertake several changes that transformed the school's atmosphere, improved student achievement, and helped KLA become one of only a few middle schools in California to exit school improvement status.

Improvements to school order and safety were the first step in the school's transformation. The school began a beautification project, the principal began each morning by greeting every student by name, and the school instituted a new uniform policy to prevent students from wearing gang colors in school. With fewer distractions and a new, more positive, school atmosphere, students could focus on more important things such as academics.

Building on this more orderly atmosphere, KLA transformed its approach to academics for both

students and teachers. First, to provide more time on core subjects, KLA moved to block scheduling with fewer, but longer, classes. This model required more teachers, and the school's charter status allowed the principal to hire new faculty who fit with the school's mission, rather than following district staffing rules based on seniority. Second, teachers implemented a schoolwide focus on vocabulary designed to expand student reading skills. Improvement in reading skills, they reasoned, would increase achievement in all other subjects. Finally, both students and teachers began to focus more on using data to hold themselves accountable

For More Information **Keiller Leadership Academy**

General Sources

University of San Diego SOLES partnership (http://www.sandiego.edu/soles/about/partner_programs/keiller_leadership_academy.php)

SchoolMatters.com data (<http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx?q/page=s1/sid=82166/midx=KeyData>)

News Articles

Alpert, E. (2008, June 10). A rare turnaround for a struggling middle school. *Voice of San Diego.org*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/articles/2008/06/10/education/896keiller061008.txt>

Alpert, E. (2008, November 26). Turbulence at the top shakes a turnaround school. *Voice of San Diego.org*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://voiceofsandiego.org/articles/2008/11/26/news/01keiller112608.txt>

Gao, H. (2005, January 1). Parents and teachers walk door-to-door to fulfill a dream. *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050101/news_7m1gompers.html



for their success. Students worked to improve their GPAs enough to be listed publicly, and teachers used student data to measure their own efficacy, set personal goals, and identify which programs worked best with their students.

Underpinning several of these successful efforts was the relationship between KLA and the University of San Diego's School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES). SOLES provided resources for board development, professional development for teachers, and research-based program support. University faculty members served on KLA's board of directors and members of the university community volunteered for various KLA tutoring and mentoring projects.

Once one of the lowest-performing schools in the district, in 2007 KLA students performed in the top 10 percent of California schools that were demographically similar. KLA tripled the number of students performing at the proficient or advanced levels on state tests, from roughly 12 percent in reading and math in 2003 to 37 percent in 2007. While the school still has a long way to go, many students have benefitted from the changes made through this restructuring effort.

Resources

Selected resources for states and districts interested in the chartering process follow.

Reports

Arkin, M. D., & Kowal, J. M. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Reopening as a charter school*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009,

from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/Knowledgelssues2Chartering.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Reopening as a Charter School*, is focused on reopening an existing school as a charter school. It examines what is known about when chartering may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

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Lake, R. J., & Hill, P. T. (Eds.) (2005). *Hopes, fears, and reality: A balanced look at American charter schools*. Seattle: University of Washington, Center for Reinventing Public Education, National Charter School Research Project. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf

This report provides data on charter schools based on surveys of state agencies and state charter associations. The report addresses charter school movement increase or decline and charter versus public school population of disadvantaged children.

• • • •

National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2007). *Principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing*. Chicago: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/final_PS_Brochure.pdf

This report reflects on lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility.

• • • •

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. (2004). *Innovations in education: Successful charter schools*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.uscharterschools.org/resources/scs/report.pdf>

This report provides a glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning.

Websites

Education Commission of the States (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>)

Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is a page on the website with links to numerous resources, including

several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

• • • •

U.S. Charter Schools (<http://www.uscharterschools.org>)

This site features a searchable database of charter school research, links to state charter laws, and other resources.

TOOL



Restructuring Checklist: Reopening as a Charter School

Successful district-authorized charter schools require...

The District to:

- Use a rigorous selection process to choose charter school providers, including:
 - A clear, fair, well-organized selection process.
 - Rigorous assessment of applicant providers' knowledge, skill, and track record for action.
 - Thorough applicant review from the educational, organizational, legal, and financial perspectives.
- Devote staff and other resources exclusively to the charter authorizing function.
- Include stakeholders, such as parents and community groups, while pressing forward with change.
- Maintain freedom of charter schools to veer from district practices.
- Provide adequate funding aligned with district school funding.
- Ensure that providers know how to choose and manage school leaders with entrepreneurial capabilities.
- Establish clear goals for school performance and monitor school performance closely.
- Establish a clear time frame for large student learning improvements.
- Provide planning time before charter school opening (more than one summer; up to one year).
- Revoke the charter and restructure again when a charter school is not successful.

The School Governance Board to:

- Commit to school mission and goals, including strong learning results by all children.
- Measure school performance against goals.
- Clarify roles on the governance board.
- Practice effective governance: appropriate structure, size, committees, officers, and board composition.
- Focus on strategy, not day-to-day school management.
- Choose an entrepreneurial school leader and manage that person well.

Continued



Restructuring Checklist: Reopening as a Charter School (continuation)

The School Leader to:

- Demonstrate behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs and school leaders: driving for results, solving problems, showing confidence, influencing others, thinking conceptually, leading teams, and committing to the organization.
- Understand effective school practices and apply to students in the school.
- Hire staff members who will best ensure student learning success, whether new or from previous school.

School Staff Members to:

- Commit to and act on the school's mission.
- Contribute to start-up and sustained school success or leave the school.

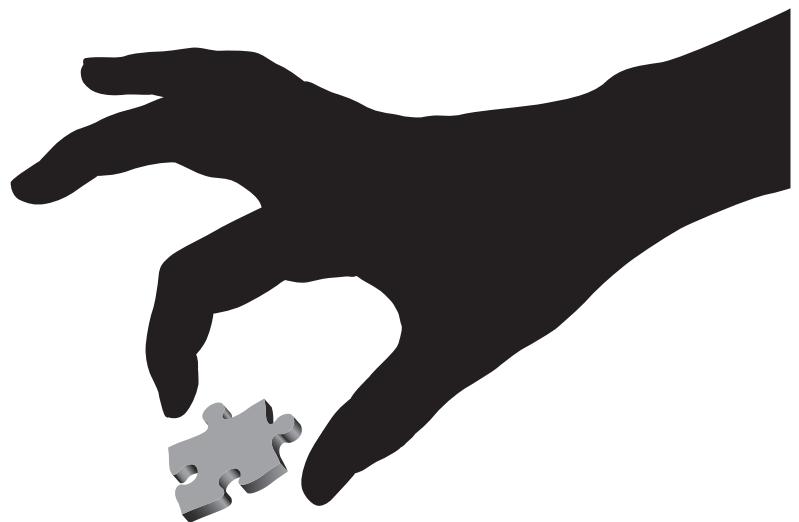
Parents and Community Groups to:

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all children in the school can learn.
- Support closing and reopening the school despite loss of relationships with school staff and leader.

Teachers Union to:

- If state law or charter contract require maintenance of union contract:
 - Allow charter school leaders who achieve large learning improvements to remove teachers and other staff who have not made needed changes.
 - Support waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students.
- No action required if charter schools are not required to follow a union contract.

Chapter 4



Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff

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Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff

The term turnaround refers to district-managed replacement of a school leader and staff who are relevant to failure in a low-performing school. Cross-industry literature uses this term to describe the phenomenon of speedy improvements—from bad to great—typically under new leaders. In the past, replacement of staff and leaders in failing schools has been called reconstitution. Turnaround literature differs from the vast body of literature about organizational change in general, which focuses on continuous, incremental improvement over longer time periods.

Approximately two thirds of the states have laws that enable districts or states to replace a school's leaders and staff, and several turnaround efforts have been undertaken under state law. Well-documented cases of school turnaround efforts include those in San Francisco, Chicago, Houston, and Prince George's County, Maryland. Some broader analysis of school reconstitutions is available as well. In some schools, turnaround efforts have increased order, stability, and parent and community involvement. Academic results, however, are mixed. Other schools have effected turnarounds, but their efforts have not been well documented.

Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Several factors influence the success or failure of school turnarounds:

- Governance

- Environment
- Leadership
- Organization

The most important factor in a successful turnaround is having the right school leader. The right leader taking the right actions can overcome barriers that otherwise would prevent success. Successful turnarounds in other sectors typically do not require broad-scale staff replacement. A discussion of these four factors follows.

Governance

This is management of the turnaround process at the district level. In a turnaround, the district manages the school leader directly and maintains ultimate power. The four most important governance factors in turnarounds include the following:

- Choosing the right school turnaround leader
- Providing timely support and aligned systems such as management and communication support, student learning data, correct funding allocation according to the school's population, and help removing ineffective staff from the school
- Allowing the turnaround leader freedom to implement necessary changes without permission, even when this leads to actions that are inconsistent with preexisting policy
- Establishing accountability for expected improvement within an accelerated time frame

Successful turnarounds typically occur without additional funding. However, more money may be helpful for recruiting top talent to lead and/or staff turnaround schools. Whatever support the district provides, it will need to be ongoing until improvements are sustained and solidified.

Environment

Parent and community support and the timeline for change also influence turnaround success. During implementation of a turnaround, successful organizations often develop a campaign to gain community support.

Successful turnarounds engage passionate stakeholders in ways that make them part of the change rather than observers on the sidelines. Communicating a clear vision of a successful future along with a stark dose of reality about current failures is a tactic in successful turnarounds. Achieving and publicizing speedy, targeted successes is essential to disempowering naysayers and emboldening those who support major change.

The timing of both turnaround planning and implementation is important. Planning time is essential. The sooner a district makes the decision to attempt a turnaround, the sooner a leader may be chosen and the more planning time the district and the leader will have.

Successful turnarounds across industries, including schools, consistently show fast, focused results on important select measures. Successful turnaround schools typically show remarkable academic improvement within one year. However, completion of turnarounds in which results are sustained may take three to five years.

Leadership

The school leader is the essential ingredient in a successful turnaround. A large majority of successful

turnarounds occur with a leader who is new to the organization. The leader must take the right actions and have turnaround leadership competencies.

Leader actions. The two major actions commonly taken by successful turnaround leaders are the following:

- Concentrating on a few very important changes with big, fast payoffs
- Acting to implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, even when they require deviations from district policies

Supporting actions taken by successful turnaround leaders include the following:

- Communicating a positive vision of future school results
- Collecting and personally analyzing school and student performance data
- Making an action plan based on the data
- Helping staff personally “see and feel” the problems students face
- Getting key influencers within the district and school to support major changes
- Measuring and reporting progress frequently and publicly
- Gathering staff often and requiring all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings
- Funneling time and money into tactics that get results, and halting unsuccessful tactics
- Making change a requirement, not an option
- Silencing change naysayers indirectly by effecting speedy success
- Acting in relentless pursuit of goals, rather than touting progress as the ultimate success

Leader Competencies. Successful turnaround leaders have a broad range of skills. They combine the behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs,

middle managers, and incremental change leaders. Examples of competencies include (Spencer & Spencer, 1993):

- **Driving for results**—setting high goals, taking initiative, and being relentlessly persistent
- **Solving problems**—using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems
- **Showing confidence**—exhibiting confidence and using failure to initiate problem solving
- **Influence**—influencing immediate action toward the school’s goals
- **Teamwork and cooperation**—getting input and keeping others informed
- **Conceptual thinking**—connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum
- **Team leadership**—assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform
- **Organizational commitment**—making personal sacrifices needed for school success
- **Communicating a compelling vision**—rousing staff to commit to the change

Successful leaders working with previously low-performing students understand research about effective schools and how it applies to the students in their building. Districts should consider selecting turnaround leaders who have a track record of initiating and implementing speedy changes amid the many challenges to success.

Organization

School organization can have an effect on success. For example:

- **Staff replacement.** Wholesale staff replacement is not necessary for a successful turnaround. However, during a successful turnaround, a small number of staff members usually is unable to make changes needed to improve student

learning. The district ensures that these people can be removed from the school.

- **Culture change.** Successful turnarounds initially focus on specific actions needed for immediate results in target areas. Sustained improvement may require a broader culture change. Common levers of culture change in schools include ongoing professional development and increased staff teamwork and communication.
- **School design.** Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. These include a clear mission guiding daily activities, an unyielding expectation that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of student progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above.

The tool, “Restructuring Checklist: Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff,” (page 37) lists the requirements of successful district-authorized turnaround schools. Familiarize yourself with the information as it will be referenced in Step 2 of the restructuring process.

A Look at Successful Restructuring **Washington Elementary School**

In 2004, the Massachusetts Department of Education investigated Washington Elementary School (Springfield). The review panel sought to uncover the reasons for the high student failure rates on the state test for both of the previous two years. The panel reviewed available data and school improvement documents, visited the school, observed classes, interviewed staff, and met with school and district leaders. The panel concluded that the existing school improvement plan did not link directly to the reasons for failure, did not provide guidance

to teachers to make explicit changes in practice, and lacked benchmarks to measure progress toward the goal of student success.

Based on this review, the Commissioner of Education designated Washington as an “underperforming school” following the 2003-04 school year and determined that state and local collaboration was necessary to revise and implement the School Improvement Plan. The local school board also placed a new principal at Washington to turn the school around. Soon after the new principal arrived, 98 percent of the staff left, unwilling to accept the principal’s high expectations for teachers. The principal replaced all but three staff members (a librarian, a teacher, and a paraprofessional) by recruiting motivated educators from within and outside the Springfield Public Schools. The principal monitored progress on district initiatives, worked toward implementation of the revised school improvement plan, developed staff capacity, strengthened pride, and inducted students and teachers into the new culture of success.

While the leadership and staff were changing, the students changed as well. A revised district boundary plan led to significant student turnover. Although the individual students were different, Washington Elementary continued to serve a higher percentage of English language learners and economically disadvantaged students than other schools in Springfield. More than 83 percent of Washington’s students came from low-income families—only about two percent fewer than the number of students from low-income families served in 2004. Despite the challenges and changes the school faced, it demonstrated remarkable improvement in student achievement. During the 2007-08 school year, Washington had one of the highest attendance rates in the district and had reduced discipline problems to nearly nothing.

The follow-up report conducted by the state two years after designating Washington as

For More Information

Washington Elementary School

Initial and follow-up reports from the Massachusetts Department of Education

- (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/cohorts/2004/02810185panel1.html>)
- (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/cohorts/2004/02810185fact.html?section=all>)
- (http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/1007/tabc_washington.doc)
- (http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/review/cohorts/2004/02810185two_year.pdf)

Washington Elementary School (<http://sps.springfield.ma.us/websites/WashingtonSchool.asp>)

Washington Elementary School report card 2007-08 (<http://sps.springfield.ma.us/websites/NCLB07-08/Washington%20NCLB%20Report%20Card%20Revised%202007-08.pdf>)



underperforming remarked upon the changed school. It highlighted that since the arrival of the principal during the 2004-05 school year, Washington Elementary had significantly increased student performance and met—and surpassed—performance targets. After making AYP for two years, Washington successfully exited improvement status only two years after the turnaround began. In 2007, Washington’s Composite Performance Index (CPI) for English Language Arts was 90.3, and for mathematics it was 76.2—up dramatically from its CPIs of 59 and 46.7 in 2004.

A Look at Successful Restructuring

Bladensburg Elementary School

Bladensburg Elementary (Bladensburg), a PK-6 comprehensive school located in Prince George’s County, Maryland, faced significant challenges in the late 1990s. From 1998-2001, the school hired

three different principals, experienced a 76 percent turnover rate in classroom teachers, and employed a largely provisionally-certified and novice faculty. The staffing turmoil undoubtedly contributed to the school's failure to adequately educate its 640 students; in 2001, fewer than a quarter of the students demonstrated reading and math proficiency or better on the state test.

In 2001, the school hired a new principal who brought with her a strong belief that all students can achieve at high levels if the adults in their lives hold high expectations for them, provide quality instruction, and ensure a safe and orderly environment in which to learn. She would not accept low socio-economic status (84 percent of her students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch) or any other challenge her students faced as an excuse for poor academic performance.

Under the principal's guidance, the school invested in the teaching staff through training and support. Teachers implemented an instructional program fully aligned with the state curriculum and received ongoing staff development in differentiating instruction based on student-level data. The school focused significantly on English language arts throughout the curriculum in order to strengthen the literacy of all students, but most especially the third of the school's students who were English language learners. Specific literacy initiatives included a schoolwide "Word of the Day," Bringing Words to Life (a research-based vocabulary development program), differentiated reading instruction, learning centers employed during reading blocks, and Reader's Theatre, a program designed to build reading stamina and fluency.

Shoring up the implementation of specific strategies was a well-prepared and highly qualified teaching staff; strategic hiring, training, and retention practices strengthened the faculty. In 2008, only one member of the 56-teacher faculty held a provisional certificate, and only 16 percent of the teachers had fewer than three years of teaching experience. Staff

For More Information

Bladensburg Elementary School

School Press Releases

November 2006 (<http://www1.pgcps.org/WorkArea/downloadasset.aspx?id=10846>)

January 2007 (<http://www1.pgcps.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=25860>)

General

BES 2007–2008 School Improvement Plan (http://www1.pgcps.org/uploadedFiles/Schools_and_Centers/Elementary_Schools/Bladensburg/2007-2008%20SIP.pdf)

Schoolmatters.com data (<http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx?q/page=s1/sid=47299/midx=KeyData>)

Newspaper Article

Hernandez, N. (2008, March 13). Reaching out, making connections. *Washington Post* (online edition). Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/12/AR2008031202285.html>



turnover dropped from a high of 76 percent before the principal's arrival to 7 percent in 2007.

In addition to rebuilding the faculty, the principal strengthened the school community through monthly parent meetings, relationship-building efforts with local organizations, and an atmosphere of accountability that made everyone—from custodial staff to paraprofessionals—part of the school's effort to achieve its mission.

The principal's continued focus on teacher quality, preparation, and retention paid off. After meeting AYP for the second year in 2007, Bladensburg Elementary exited school improvement status.

Student test scores improved dramatically during the turnaround, with the percent of students proficient or better rising from 26.2 percent in 2003 to 70.6 percent in 2007.

References

Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Resources

Resources for states and districts interested in this option follow.

Reports

Kowal, J. M., & Hassel, E. A. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Turnarounds with new leaders and staff*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/Knowledgelssues4Turnaround.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff*, focuses on the option of replacing

school leaders and staff. It examines what is known about when turnarounds may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

Websites

Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (www.centerforcsri.org)

The Center has numerous publications on NCLB implementation.

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School Turnaround (<http://schooldturnaround.org>)

School Turnaround is a national nonprofit organization that trains principals to adopt the methods of successful school turnaround leaders to produce dramatic learning improvements. Consultants who have turned schools around train and coach principals. This organization was founded by a successful school turnaround leader.

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Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/vdoe/>)

This is a state-level program for identifying and training school turnaround specialists. Principals with high potential for turnaround leadership are identified, trained, and coached to lead school turnarounds. The program is a collaboration between the University of Virginia's education and graduate business schools.

Restructuring Checklist: Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff

TOOL



Successful turnarounds require...

The District to:

- Choose a leader with turnaround capabilities for the school.
- Provide timely support and aligned systems to the school, including at least:
 - Management and communication support.
 - Student learning progress data.
 - Correct funding allocation according to school population.
 - Help removing ineffective staff members.
- Allow leaders freedom to change school practices, even when inconsistent with districtwide practices.
- Establish clear goals for school performance.
- Establish a clear, short time frame for initial large improvements (e.g., one school year).
- Monitor school performance closely.
- Include stakeholders, such as parents and community groups, while pressing forward with change.
- Provide planning time before the turnaround attempt (more than one summer).
- Allow at least three years to improve and sustain successful Year 1 turnarounds.
- Restructure again when a turnaround is not successful.

The School Leader to:

- Take proven turnaround actions, including at least:
 - Concentrating first on a few, very important change goals with big, fast payoffs.
 - Acting to implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, even when they require deviations from district policies.
- Demonstrate behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and change leaders—driving for results, solving problems, showing confidence, influencing others, thinking conceptually, leading teams, cooperating, committing to the organization, and communicating a compelling vision.
- Understand effective school practices and apply them to students in the school.

Continued



Restructuring Checklist: Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff (continuation)

- Influence stakeholders to support change, including:
 - Communicate current problems, why current achievement levels are unacceptable.
 - Communicate a positive vision of future school success.
 - Silence naysayers quickly.
- Identify school staff members who contribute to turnaround success; ask others to leave the school.
- Sustain initial successes with longer term culture change.

School Staff Members to:

- Contribute to turnaround success or leave the school.

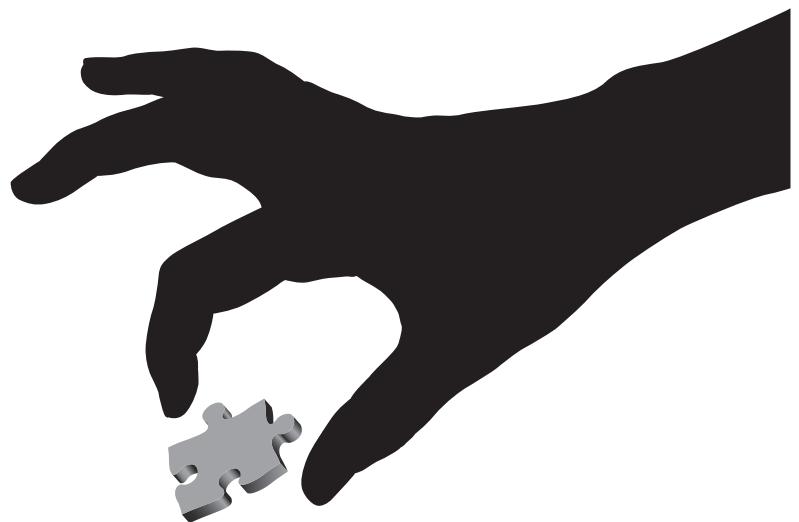
Parents and Community Groups to:

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all students in the school can learn.
- Support change, even when a new school leader is needed.

Teachers Union to:

- Allow school turnaround leaders who achieve large Year 1 learning improvements to remove from the school teachers and other staff who have not made needed changes.
- Agree to contract waivers allowing changes needed to support learning by previously unsuccessful students.

Chapter 5



Contracting With External Education Management Providers

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Contracting With External Education Management Providers

Contracting refers to an agreement undertaken by the governing board of a public school district with an outside organization to deliver comprehensive educational and management services to a failing school. The district retains ultimate authority and control through its ability to set the terms of the contract and terminate the agreement if the terms are not met.

Contracting is different from chartering, in which the contract is governed by state charter laws. In a noncharter contract, every aspect of the arrangement is negotiated. Contracting also is different from contracts for individual school services such as cafeteria management, security, transportation, tutoring, and supplemental services for special needs students. Contracts for comprehensive educational and management services are a much more recent and less common development. While most early contractors were for-profit organizations, many nonprofits now provide whole-school management services. Whole-school contractors are called education management organizations (EMOs) in this guide.

Contracting in education, particularly for whole-school management, is a recent phenomenon. Research about results is limited. Six years of survey research on for-profit EMOs by the University of Arizona indicates that in 2004-05 there were 59 EMOs nationally, managing 535 schools with about 239,766 students in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Currently, EMOs are increasing sup-

plemental services, such as tutoring, rather than expanding whole-school management.

Charter schools are a large and growing subset of contracting efforts. In 2004-05, the 59 for-profit EMOs managed 21.7 percent of all charter schools. Of the schools run by tracked EMOs, 86.3 percent were charter schools. The number of district schools under noncharter contract management has remained relatively stable to date. There were 77 district schools under management in 2004-05. EMOs typically serve low-income, urban, and minority students.

Overall, results are mixed. In some contract schools, students learn more than in comparable district-run schools; in others, students learn less. Some EMOs produce better results, and some contract arrangements produce better results.

Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Several factors influence the success or failure of school contracting. These include:

- System-level governance
- Environment
- School-level governance
- School leadership
- Organization

The most influential among these are the governance of the contracting process at the system

level, the contract terms, school governance by the contracted EMO, and school leadership. Districts that choose to contract have enormous control over all of these as well as other success factors. A brief overview of each factor follows.

System-Level Governance

Leadership and management of the entire contracting effort are critical, with the district acting as the process organizer, negotiator, and ongoing manager of contract arrangements. Factors that affect the success of contracting include the following:

- **Selection process.** The district's goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success quickly with students who have not succeeded in district schools. Doing this requires a selection process that is rigorous, transparent, and fair. It includes:
 - **Rigor and rules.** Districts where leaders implement and follow formalized processes and thoroughly evaluate each application have the most success minimizing conflicts during and after the selection process. Not all contract applicants are as good as they seem on paper. Districts must evaluate providers' expertise, track records, and financial credentials closely.
 - **Transparency.** A selection process that encourages open communication between the district, the applicants, and the community can help diffuse community resistance and ensure that the EMO selected best matches the needs of the school and the community.
 - **Fairness.** Practices include setting specific criteria for selection, recruiting diverse teams to review applications, and keeping the process open and competitive. Recruiting a large, high-quality pool of applicants often is the first step. The district's selection team must avoid playing favorites, because even the slightest appearance of favoritism

can increase resistance to change in the community.

- **Community involvement.** The contracting process and first year of school operation are challenging, and district contracting efforts appear to be especially susceptible to disruption. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders, while also pressing forward with change, are the most successful.
- **Ongoing oversight and accountability.** When the district contracts out school management, ultimate responsibility for success remains with the district. The district must set expectations and then establish a process for monitoring progress. Combining autonomy and accountability works best when there is:
 - **Clarity.** Resistance is common among central office staff, even when existing district schools have failed for many years. Thus, one task of the governing body responsible for overseeing the contracting process is educating and creating buy-in among central office staff. Clarity also is critical in the written contract; this is necessary for effective oversight later. The most successful contracts—those easiest to implement and monitor successfully—establish clear performance measures to help determine whether the contractor has fulfilled obligations.
 - **Capacity.** The most successful district contracting has been done when a dedicated group is created within the district to manage and implement contracting. Such a group can focus on communicating and creating clarity in the contracting and oversight processes.

Environment

Several factors outside of a contracted school's control can affect success. These factors include a

broad range of external supports, freedoms, and constraints, including the following:

- **Timetable.** Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing contractors, who then need time to plan and organize each school. However, too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much. [Note: The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law.]
- **Contract terms.** Establishing the right contract terms is critical. In addition to specifying the funds that the district will pay the EMO, the contract should include the following:
 - *Freedom to act.* Districts can ensure school operational autonomy during the contracting phase, but this takes commitment, as the natural tendency is for districts to seek continued control over daily school functions. Districts also should ensure that contract schools are not prevented from using practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students, such as longer school days and selection of staff committed to the school's approach.
 - *Accountability.* Establishing performance criteria and clarifying the process for monitoring and evaluating results over specified time periods are key to contract success. The best contracts include a performance-based relationship, a timeline for improvement as well as results, public reporting of results, consequences, and fiscal incentives such as EMO compensation based on results.
 - *Clear delegation of responsibilities.* A large barrier to success in contracted schools has been lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of the EMO and district. Lack of clarity diffuses responsibility and

leads to conflicts that can be expensive and distracting from the educational work of the school.

- **District support.** A contracted school may depend on district staff and resources for a variety of services. Facilities maintenance is one common type of support that districts provide to EMOs, but there can be many others. The requirements and guidelines for district support should be included in the contract to avoid later conflict and recriminations.

School-Level Governance

Different EMOs have differing governance models for overseeing the multiple schools they manage. EMOs should be selected based on the specific needs of the school and the characteristics discussed in this chapter. Common ways in which EMO governance differs are design specificity and degree of management control over individual schools.

School Leadership

Each contract school is essentially a start-up within a larger organization, the EMO. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent of performers to average performers has found strong similarities among start-up leaders in differing industries.

Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include:

- Driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and persistence)
- Solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses)
- Showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses)
- Influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals).

Similar research shows that the highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual

thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals), and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals). Districts should look for EMOs that are capable of recruiting and managing leaders with entrepreneurial competencies.

Organization

One controversial aspect of contract schools is the impact on unionized district staff. Collective bargaining contracts often conflict with practices in an EMO model, and with practices proven to work with previously low-performing students (e.g., selection of staff who agree with the EMO approach, longer school days, etc.). Districts choosing this option and keeping union staff must ensure that union contract waivers are available to allow practices crucial to student success.

Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. They include:

- Clear mission guiding daily activities
- High, unyielding expectations that all students will learn
- Frequent monitoring of student progress
- Responsive approaches for struggling students
- Knowledge of current research on teaching and learning
- Uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning
- Safe and orderly environment
- Strong home-school connection
- Strong leadership

The tool, “Restructuring Checklist: Contracting with External Education Management Providers,” (page 47) lists the requirements of successful district-authorized contract schools. Familiarize your-

self with the information, as it will be referenced in Step 2 of the restructuring process.

A Look at Successful Restructuring

Dodge Renaissance Academy

Based on low academic performance, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) closed Dodge Elementary School on Chicago’s west side in 2002. Three quarters of Dodge students performed below the national average in math, and 85 percent did so in reading; this dismal performance was well below the district average. After closing the school, the district opted to keep it closed for a year while soliciting outside contractors to take over its management. In September 2003, the school reopened as Dodge Renaissance Academy, serving PK-Grade 8 with an entirely new staff under the governance of the Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL).

New students arrived at Dodge—nearly all of them from low-socioeconomic backgrounds—and the district watched closely for AUSL to demonstrate significant academic gains for its students. AUSL, a local nonprofit that provides an alternative preparation route for teachers, placed its alumni in the school and, upon reopening Dodge, also used the school as one of its teacher-training sites. This set-up benefited Dodge by providing additional staff in classrooms. With both a master teacher and a teacher-in-training in many classrooms, students received more individual attention and support.

Once reopening, the school got off to a bumpy start when its principal left mid-year. Unwilling to let the turnaround effort falter, in its second year AUSL hired a new principal who was a graduate of the New Leaders for New Schools program and an experienced teacher and businessperson. The new principal focused on three levers of change: creating order, hiring and developing talented teachers, and focusing on standards-based instruction. The principal first focused on creating an orderly

For More Information

Dodge Renaissance Academy

Report

New Leaders for New Schools (2008). *Key insights of the urban excellence framework*. New York: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.nlns.org/documents/NewLeadersReport-Version3.0-FINAL.pdf>

Websites

Dodge Renaissance Academy (<http://www.dodgeacademy.org/>)

AUSL Residency Program (<http://www.ausl-chicago.org/program.html>)



environment in which students could learn effectively. This order was maintained through clearly articulated expectations and rapid response to every infraction.

Second, the principal focused on hiring and developing talented people, following his belief that school leaders should hire smart people who seek professional development and provide them with the opportunity and room to grow. He removed obstacles to teacher success and helped them to feel appreciated and supported. For example, he rearranged the budget to provide each teacher with a laptop computer.

The principal fostered an atmosphere of collaboration by carving out time each week for staff to learn from one another and to solve problems together. Teachers visited colleague's classrooms, videotaped lessons to provide and receive concrete feedback,

and participated in AUSL afterschool training sessions twice weekly. If teachers, despite these supports, were not performing to standards, they could be removed. In Chicago, principals can remove nontenured teachers at the end of a school year, and the principal used this option when necessary. He also counseled veteran teachers who were a poor fit for the Dodge model to leave the school, and he created an environment in which teachers who were not willing to work to his standards left on their own.

Finally, the principal stressed standards-based instruction, but did not use scripted programs because he believed scripts do not challenge either students or teachers. He chose to focus on language arts during the first year. Dodge staff used a balanced literacy approach that sought to provide students with the skills both to decipher and make meaning from what they read. To support this priority, he hired two instructional trainers who were well versed in the balanced literacy approach.

The principal recognized that in addition to his own efforts, AUSL's management contributed greatly to Dodge's success. He noted at least two benefits of reporting to AUSL: he did not spend time convincing the district of his strategies, and AUSL's management shielded him from local politics that can hinder improvement efforts in district schools.

Two years after the new principal's arrival, the school posted the largest gains of any elementary school in the city. Student performance rose sharply from 2004—the end of its first year after reopening—when roughly a third of students were proficient in English language arts and math (30.4% and 33.6%, respectively) to 2007, when the school had more than doubled the number of youth performing proficient or better (ELA 62.8%, math 74.3%).

Resources

Resources for states and districts interested in this restructuring option follow.

Reports

Hannaway, J. (1999). *Contracting as a mechanism for managing educational services*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from http://www.worldbank.org.cn/english/content/Jane_Hannaway.pdf

This policy brief discusses the contract and oversight process for educational management organizations.

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Kowal, J. M., & Arkin, M. D. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Contracting with external education management providers*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/Knowledgelssues3Contracting.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, focuses on contracting with an outside entity to operate the school. It examines what is known about when contracting may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

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National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2007). *Principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing*. Chicago: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/final_PS_Brochure.pdf

This report reflects on lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The Principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The Standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility.

Websites

Education Commission of the States (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>)

Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is a page on the website with links to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

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Education Service Provider Clearinghouse (<http://www.charterauthorizers.org/esp/>)

This is a one-stop source of objective information about education service providers serving charter schools nationwide. Among other useful data, the site contains information about 22 educational management organizations.

Restructuring Checklist: Contracting With External Education Management Providers



Successful contracting for education management requires...

The District to:

- Use a rigorous selection process to choose contract school providers, including:
 - A clear, fair, well-organized selection process that is open to the public.
 - Rigorous assessment of applicant provider knowledge, skill, and track record for action.
 - Thorough applicant review from the educational, organizational, legal, and financial perspectives.
- Include stakeholders, such as parents and community groups, while pressing forward with change.
- Devote staff and other resources exclusively to the management contracting function.
- Establish freedom of contract schools to veer from district practices.
- Clarify roles of the school provider and district in the contract.
- Clarify in the contract support that the district will provide, including facilities, funding, and services.
- Ensure that district central office staff support the contract school as intended and contracted.
- Ensure that providers know how to choose and manage school leaders with entrepreneurial capabilities.
- Obtain union contract waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students and allowing removal of ineffective staff.
- Establish clear goals for school performance and monitor school performance closely.
- Establish a clear time frame for broad student learning improvements.
- Provide planning time before contract school opening (more than one summer, up to one year).
- Cancel the contract and restructure again when a contract provider is not successful.

The School Management Provider or EMO to:

- Adapt its program as required to meet the needs of the student population.
- Choose a capable school leader and manage that person well.

Continued



Restructuring Checklist: Contracting With External Education Management Providers

(continuation)

The School Leader to:

- Demonstrate behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs and school leaders: driving for results, solving problems, showing confidence, influencing others, thinking conceptually, leading teams, and committing to the organization.
- Understand effective school practices and apply them to students in the school.
- Hire staff members who will best ensure student learning success, whether new or from previous school.

School Staff to:

- Commit to and act on the school's mission.
- Contribute to start-up and sustained school success or leave the school.

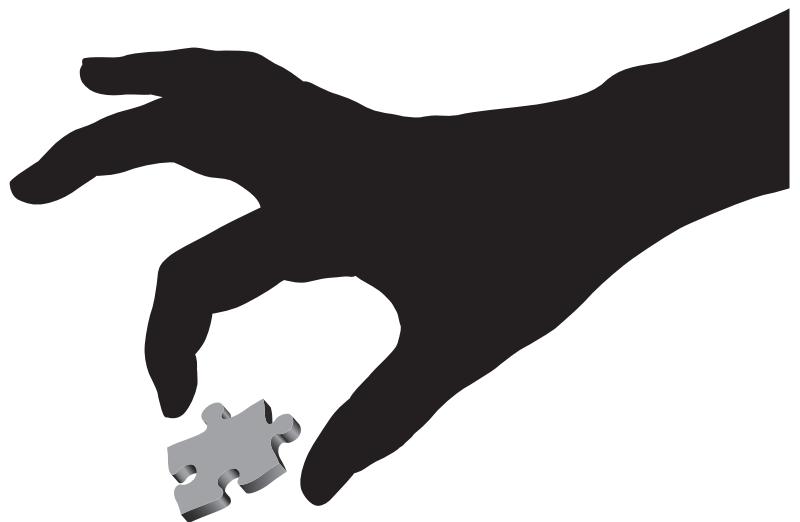
Parents and Community Groups to:

- Understand that current school performance is not good enough.
- Believe that all students in the school can learn.
- Support closing and reopening the school despite possible loss of relationships with staff and leader.

Teachers Union to:

- If contract includes maintenance of union contract:
 - Allow contractors who achieve broad learning improvements to remove ineffective teachers and staff.
 - Support waivers allowing changes needed for learning by previously unsuccessful students.
- No action required if contract does not require school management provider to hire union staff.

Chapter 6



State Takeovers of Schools

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State Takeovers of Schools

In recent years, states have taken over individual schools that are failing. In some cases, these constitute a “friendly” takeover in which the district invites the state to take over and manage a consistently low-performing school. In other cases, especially when the state initiates the takeover, the takeover is considered “hostile.” At this point, only a handful of states have initiated and plan to continue initiating hostile school takeovers for academic reasons, but that number may grow.

The lack of voluntary state takeovers indicates that giving up control—even of failing schools—may not appeal to many districts. In 2005, 23 states had the legal right to take over schools. Once a state takes over a school, presumably, state officials then select one of the other restructuring options and manage the ensuing process. [Note: NCLB does not explicitly address what the state should do after taking over a school.] This chapter focuses on the process of state takeover itself and not on the restructuring options facing the state.

Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Several factors can influence the success or failure of this option, including:

- System-level governance
- School-level governance
- Environment

The most important factor is the state’s capacity to govern the process and provide significant help to low-performing schools.

System-Level Governance

Taking over individual schools at the request of a district would be a new role for virtually every state that considered it. In order to take on this role, states would need to design a new governance structure to oversee and implement the process. For example, at the top of the governance system there would need to be an entity with oversight responsibility. Similar to a board of directors in a corporate structure, the oversight body would be a decision-making entity charged with planning the effort and with selecting, monitoring, and evaluating the intervention methods. This governing body may be more effective if it were:

- Representative of the stakeholders in the school and community
- Independent of local interests in the district
- Knowledgeable about effective interventions and improvement in low-performing schools
- Allowed enough planning time (e.g., a few months over the summer is not enough)
- Tough enough to withstand political heat in pursuit of better schools
- Sensitive to local concerns and willing to listen and collaborate with cooperative groups

In addition to appointing an oversight body, each state that has experience with district and school takeovers also has created an office that supports the oversight body. This office assumes responsibility for the day-to-day work associated with running the takeover process. States may lack capacity and funding to provide this kind of working group,

however. Staff members must be capable of managing a complex process and committed to the overall goals of the takeover. Being fair, transparent with accountability data, and adequately funded are important for this function.

School-Level Governance

All restructuring methods require specific oversight of each school and school leader. A key role of the system-level governance group would be to ensure that restructuring includes selection of a group to oversee each individual school, also called school-level governance.

For example, if a state maintains direct control of a school, as it would when providing an intervention team or appointing a new principal, the state would need to govern each school directly. This may limit the number of schools that a state can effectively take over. If a state chooses to restructure schools by chartering or contracting, then the charter and contract providers would be responsible for school governance.

Environment

Other factors affect takeover success, including:

- **Accountability.** This includes establishing a system for monitoring and evaluating school results. Elements are setting school performance expectations, determining how progress will be measured, and determining when the school will be released from state oversight.
- **Additional support.** There is limited research about how much and what type of support works. States often are limited in how much instructional support they can offer due to lack of funding for staff and inadequate instructional knowledge.
- **Freedom to act.** When typical strategies have not worked, school leaders may need the freedom to try alternative approaches

to staffing, school year length, school day length, teacher salaries, allocation of money, curriculum, and student attendance policies. State policies or collective bargaining agreements may limit the freedom that states can grant even in a voluntary takeover.

A Look at Successful Restructuring

Georgia's Approach to Restructuring

Georgia's constitution does not allow for the state to take over failing schools, but this did not prevent the Georgia Department of Education from taking a leading role in turning around schools in need of improvement. Georgia actively worked toward earlier and more comprehensive assistance for struggling schools starting in 2004, when it began its statewide school improvement network. Under this improvement network, schools that were in Year 7 or higher of "needs improvement" (NI) status were provided with additional supports and services and required to enter into an improvement contract with the state.

Recognizing the benefits of this state-directed contractual approach, Georgia sought to bring schools into state-directed status two years earlier—in Year 5 of NI status—and to tailor other improvement efforts to better fit each struggling school. In August of 2008, the U.S. Department of Education approved Georgia's differentiated accountability (DA) plan, which provided some flexibility in Georgia's implementation of NCLB's school improvement and restructuring requirements. With this flexibility, Georgia can choose to provide certain supports—such as supplemental education services—at different points from those prescribed by federal law.

Georgia also created three levels of schools in need of improvement, which include "improvement," "corrective action," and "state directed" schools. In the first two years of not making AYP, a school

is labeled an improvement school and assigned an improvement specialist to assist with efforts to strengthen student performance. For Years 3 and 4, a tiered approach to NI schools—labeled corrective action schools—is implemented, allowing for more tailored consequences and supports to schools with different needs and challenges.

Upon entering the fifth year of NI status (and any year beyond), schools are identified as “state directed.” State-directed schools receive more intense support, and a shift is made from school-level decision-making to the Georgia Department of Education, laying out the improvement plan in a contract. Georgia’s Department of Education requires a state-directed school to enter into a contract with the state that outlines expectations and roles of key individuals from the school, the school district, and the State Department of Education in the school improvement process. The contract, although it includes a number of nonnegotiable aspects, is tailored to the specific needs of the school, based on the most recent school data, and created with input from school, district, and state representatives.

A number of nonnegotiable clauses were included in the contract. These include:

- Assignment of a full-time state director to the schools in Years 7-9 of NI, and half-time to schools in Years 5-6 of NI
- Direct involvement of the state director in replacement of staff as needed
- Implementation of the state frameworks in each classroom
- Administration of benchmark assessments
- Analysis of teacher and student attendance and student discipline
- Participation in required professional learning for state-directed schools
- Hiring of instructional coaches
- Participation in the Georgia Analysis of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) at NI Year 5 and NI Year 7 levels

- Development of short-term, 45-60 day, action plans to target specific needs

The state director at each school provides direct supervision in the implementation of all school improvement actions, and a variety of services including:

- Conducting observations of teachers and providing feedback
- Assisting the leadership team in developing and implementing the school improvement plan
- Attending and facilitating both grade-level and vertical-collaborative planning sessions
- Assisting teachers in the effective utilization of student progress data and monitoring of data from a variety of sources
- Providing professional learning for teachers as needed
- Guiding instructional coaches in planning for Georgia Performance Standards implementation
- Identifying necessary resources for full implementation of the school improvement plan

For More Information Georgia

Georgia’s differentiated accountability system and school improvement websites:

- (http://www.gadoe.org/tss_school.aspx) Choose “School Improvement Field Book” for more information on the state-directed contract process
- (http://www.gadoe.org/pea_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1648)

Letter from the Assistant Secretary of Education at the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/differentiatedaccountability/gaconditions.pdf>)



- Co-observing with instructional coaches to ensure a common understanding of performance-based instruction and utilization of data to inform instruction
- Providing assistance to administrators in understanding and interpreting AYP requirements
- Assisting administrators in developing a plan to monitor teacher effectiveness and to address ineffective personnel
- Co-developing short-term action plans with administrators to address identified needs through a thorough analysis of data
- Monitoring the appropriate use of budget planning and expenditure of funds to support instruction
- Monitoring adherence to the state-directed contract

The presence of a state director in the school and the power of a contract with the state place added pressure on schools to improve, but with commensurate supports. Georgia has some apparent success with this approach. Under the earlier pilot of this state-directed approach—Involving only schools in NI Year 7 or higher—12 of the 19 schools involved made AYP in 2008 for the first time ever. One state-level school improvement staff member noted, “We know what works, we know how to do it; it’s a matter of getting into the schools and helping them implement these changes.”

Resources

Resources for states and districts interested in this option follow.

Reports

Steiner, L. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? State takeovers of individual schools*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center

for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssuesIStateTakeovers.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, focuses on turning the operation of the school over to the state. It examines what is known about the use of state takeovers as a way to improve failing schools, and issues that state policymakers should address when considering state takeovers as a policy option. A summary of the paper is available in the Appendix of this guide.

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Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2001, August-September). *Does school district takeover work? Assessing the effectiveness of city and state takeover as a school reform strategy*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED468271&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED468271

The paper examines the potential for city and state takeovers to turn around low-performing schools. The study employs a national multilevel database to empirically analyze takeover reform.

• • • •

Ziebarth, T. (2002). *State takeovers and reconstitution*. Denver: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/13/59/1359.htm>

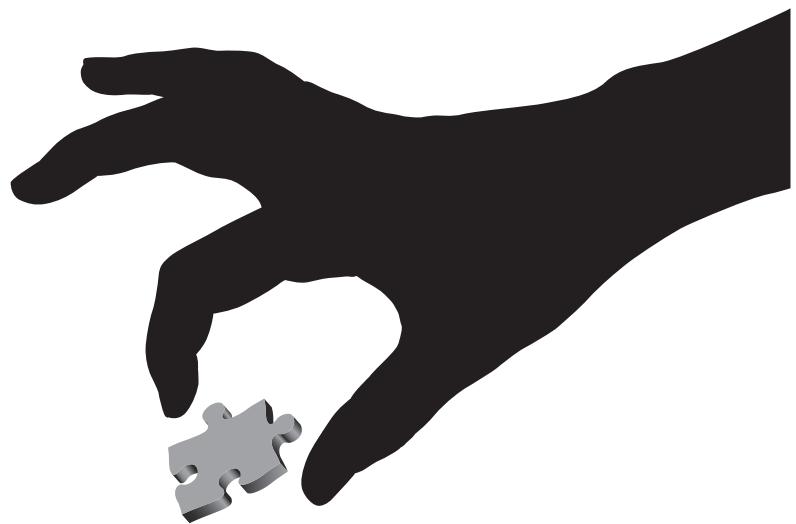
The policy brief presents overviews, discusses opposing perspectives, examines effects, and offers questions for state policymakers about state takeovers of districts and schools and reconstitutions of schools.

Website

Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (www.centerforcsri.org)

The Center has numerous publications on NCLB Implementation.

Chapter 7



Step 1: Taking Charge of Change— Big Change

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Step 1: Taking Charge of Change—Big Change

Big, fast changes are very different from longer term ones made in small steps. Big improvements in results require big changes in what happens with students in the classroom. This happens when time, materials, activities, information, and attitudes make a big shift. Big improvements almost never happen without a change in how decisions are made and by whom. This is typically called leadership and governance.

Tasks for Step 1 include:

- Organizing the district restructuring team
- Assessing the team and district capacity to govern restructuring decisions
- Deciding whether to invite a state takeover of the entire restructuring process
- Making a plan to include stakeholders in choosing restructuring strategies
- Preparing the team to take further action

Organizing the District Restructuring Team

The first major action is to form a district team. This team will be responsible for organizing and leading the restructuring process. Having a strong restructuring governance team is a key component of success.

This can be a huge job—and a difficult one if your district has been uncomfortable making big changes in the past. Big change requires a focus on student

learning above all and willpower to resist inevitable pressure to compromise. The team must be committed to taking new approaches when previous efforts have not worked well enough for failing students.

Having a team is not enough if your superintendent and school board are not ready to support big changes with resolve. Some school board members may be unfamiliar with major restructuring options or may not support any efforts that “stir the pot” of public dissent, even when change is needed for struggling students. Part of Step 2 will be developing an influence strategy for your school board.

If you cannot obtain this support, a state takeover may be needed to help students in failing schools. But even when top leadership—the superintendent or school board—initiates and leads the restructuring process, a team is needed to plan, execute, and monitor major change in multiple schools.

Keep this working team small enough to focus on action. Teams larger than seven members may have trouble making decisions and taking action. Your district team may begin its work with only a few central office staff members. The remainder of Step 1 will help you add others. One of your early steps will be including all important stakeholders in other ways. You also may choose to involve outside restructuring experts or process facilitators to help, either immediately or at a later date.

Selecting Team Members

Who should be on your team to organize restructuring throughout the district? Readiness and willingness to drive major change are important, but credibility and district knowledge also are important.

Consider including people with the following attributes and skills.

- **A drive for results.** This includes a record of implementing change despite political and practical barriers; an unyielding belief that all students—no matter how disadvantaged—can learn; and organizing and planning skills to keep the decision-making process and implementation for each failing school on track.
- **Relationship and influence skills.** This includes good relationships with a wide range of district staff, parents, and community organizations; willingness and ability to disagree with others politely; teamwork skills to complete tasks responsibly and support team members; and strong influence skills.
- **Readiness for change.** This includes having an open mind about ways to improve student learning; willingness to learn about what kinds of big changes work under differing circumstances; willingness to try new restructuring strategies; and not having a political agenda that may interfere with student learning-centered decisions.
- **Knowledge to do what works** (or willingness to acquire it quickly). This includes knowledge of the formal and informal decision-making processes in your district; knowledge of past efforts to change and improve schools in your district; and knowledge of education management, effective schools research and the like, with a focus on what has been proven to produce learning results with disadvantaged students.

The tool, “Restructuring Team Checklist,” (page 67) can be used as a quick reference guide when thinking about potential team members.

Assessing the Team and District Capacity

The district’s capacity to govern the decision-making and change process is a critical factor in determining whether to turn over the entire restructuring process to the state. The text box, “What Works When Restructuring Decision Tree,” provides a snapshot of the thinking that goes into choosing among the various restructuring options. It includes consideration of turning low-performing schools over to the state.

The team’s first task will be to assess its own capacity to lead the process of selecting school restructuring strategies. [Note: Although this is rarely the case, some state education agencies may request or demand involvement in restructuring decisions from the start, regardless of the district’s wishes.] The tool, “Assessing Your District’s Capacity to Lead Change,” (page 68) can be used to help you assess whether your district is up to the task. The tool uses a common strategic planning framework to analyze capacity. The team identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to key change factors, which include:

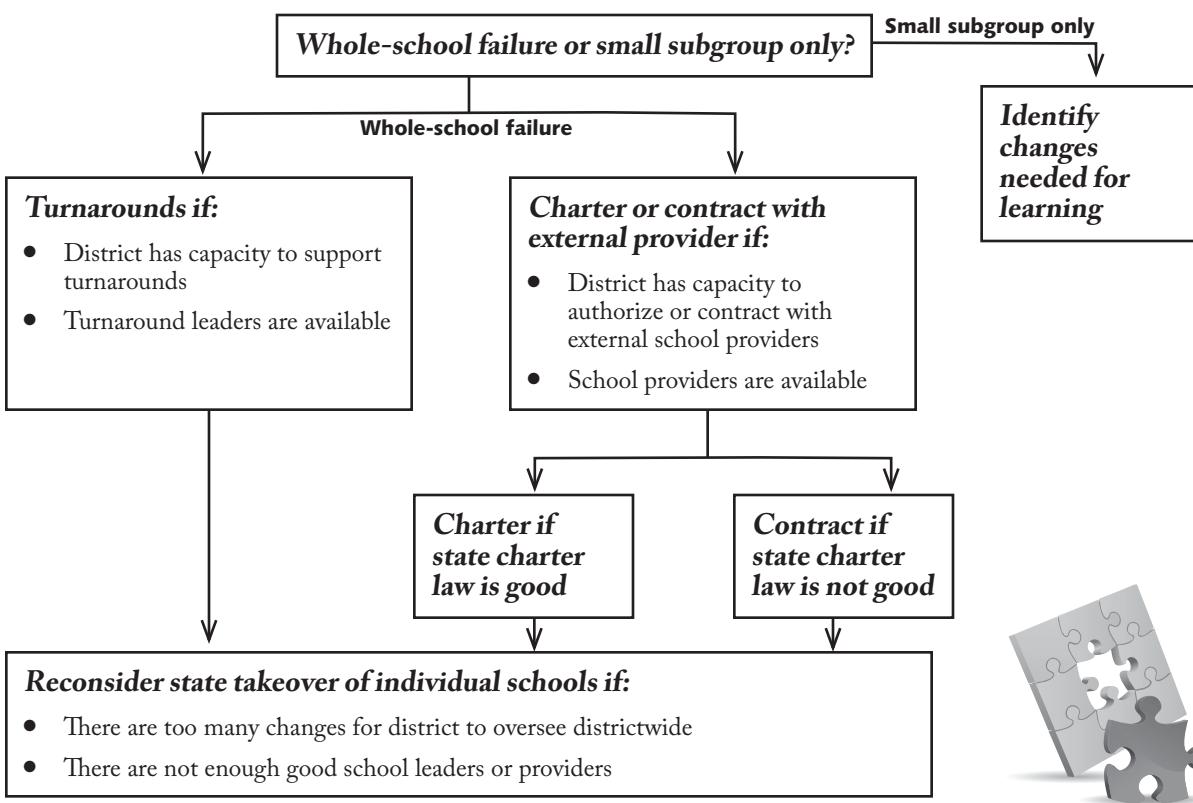
- **Team staff.** The key question is whether the district has staff with the necessary qualifications to form a restructuring team. A discussion of the tool, “Restructuring Team Checklist,” can help focus the conversation.
- **Will.** The key question is whether the district is willing to take extreme action to address failing schools.
- **Use of outsiders.** The key question is whether the district is willing to bring in outsiders if necessary (e.g., to lead turnarounds, to manage schools).

- **Use of insiders.** The key question is whether the district is willing to require central office staff members to make necessary changes to support restructured schools.
- **Freedom to act.** The key question is whether the district is willing to give capable leaders freedom to change.

If your district is not capable of leading change, then you will need to reconsider who is on the district team, and possibly ask the state to take over the restructuring process throughout the district or in individual low-performing schools.

At this time, discuss why restructuring failed schools can be a challenge. One of the major challenges is assessing the district's ability to shift behaviors. District behaviors that allow big changes to produce learning success among students who are failing are different from those that ensure efficiency, consistency, and stability of more successful schools. The more direct control a district keeps of restructuring—for example, by attempting turnarounds rather than contracting or chartering—the more its behaviors will need to shift. The less the district shifts, the less successful restructured schools may be.

What Works When Restructuring Decision Tree



The tool, “District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success,” (page 69) describes how some of these behaviors will need to change. Take some time to discuss whether the district is capable of assuming these new behaviors.

Deciding Whether to Invite a State Takeover

The primary reason to invite a state takeover is governance capacity. This issue may arise at one of the following two points in your restructuring process:

- **Restructuring decisions.** The district is not able to govern the restructuring decision process for all failing schools.
- **Restructuring implementation.** The district does not have capacity to oversee restructuring implementation in every individual school.

Now is the time to decide whether a state takeover of the entire restructuring process for all failing schools makes sense. [Note: At the end of Step 2, once a best-chance restructuring strategy has been chosen for each school, this guide revisits the possibility of inviting state takeover of those individual schools for which the district does not have the capacity to oversee restructuring.]

The reasons a district might give up control of the restructuring process to the state include the following:

- **Frustration.** Districts that have made numerous failed efforts to improve schools where many students are not learning may want to turn the task over to others.
- **Capability.** Less affluent and small districts may not have the resources or knowledge needed to implement successful restructuring options on their own.
- **Cost.** It may be cheaper for some districts to involve the state rather than to set up a separate district effort.

- **Shifting focus.** Letting go of the lowest performing schools may allow the district to better focus on the rest of its schools; this may be worth the loss of funds that flow to the district for the low-performing schools.
- **Access to talent.** Some districts may lack access to a pool of school turnaround leaders, start-up leaders, and/or consultants to help manage the restructuring process.
- **Access to providers.** Some districts may not be able to attract school providers that have been successful with low-performing students.

The reasons a state might consider taking over the restructuring process include the following:

- **Accountability.** States are increasingly being held accountable for school learning results by citizens, courts, and the federal government.
- **Funding.** States are providing a higher proportion of school funding than they have in the past.
- **Cost.** It may cost the state less to set up a statewide restructuring effort than to support such initiatives in districts throughout the state.
- **Effectiveness.** Some research indicates that state governance teams place more value than district teams on research and data-based decisions (success factors for schools of all types) and are more current in their understanding of best practices.
- **Access to talent.** States may have access to a larger pool of school turnaround leaders, school start-up leaders, and restructuring consultants than districts.
- **Access to providers.** States may be more capable than districts of attracting national school providers that have been successful with low-performing students.

To date, nearly all takeovers of schools by states have been involuntary; the districts have not given up control freely, but rather have done so when forced by the state. For example, under NCLB,

takeover by a state is a voluntary option for districts to consider for schools failing to make AYP for five years. In this case, both the district and state must agree that this is the right thing to do.

Offering extensive help to state officials who take over schools is beyond the scope of this guide. For more discussion of the state takeover option, including findings helpful to states involved in takeovers, see the text box, “Governance in a State Takeover.” For more information on state takeovers under NCLB, see “State Takeovers of Individual Schools: Education Leaders’ Summary” in the Appendix of this guide.

Making a Plan to Include Stakeholders

All successful restructuring efforts include involving and managing stakeholders. Stakeholders help schools make big, successful changes when they do the following:

- Provide valuable input to help a district and school choose a restructuring path that will best meet student needs
- Influence others in the school and broader community to embrace big changes with a chance of producing dramatic improvement in learning
- Provide help to restructured schools

There are different ways to involve stakeholders in the process. These include:

- Involving them in the district restructuring team and/or on school-level teams that recommend restructuring strategies
- Having input into decisions and/or having decision-making authority
- Staying informed

Stakeholders may be within or outside of the school and district. Common stakeholder groups include the following:

- Teachers working in the school
- The current principal(s)
- Parents
- Students (particularly in middle and high schools)
- Teachers’ union
- Special education and English language learner representatives
- Grass roots community organizations
- Local business associations
- Nonprofits that conduct fundraising or support public schools in your community
- Other vocal, informed, or interested groups in your community
- District staff who have worked with the school in the past
- District staff whose support the restructured school will need, (e.g., staff members in accounting for budgeting at school level; human resources for hiring, firing, transfer, and professional development; Title I and other federal funding staff; transportation for altered school schedules; and data processing for student progress monitoring during school year)

Factors that affect stakeholder involvement include the following:

- **Time available to make restructuring decisions.** More stakeholder input is possible if you organized your district team early. This is one way to use the planning year effectively. However, allowing too much time can leave powerful groups who are at odds with change time to organize and derail the process before it begins. Urgent change decisions and action will by necessity allow less time for input. But even urgent change situations—when your district has less time to choose and implement a restructuring plan—should include input from key stakeholders.

Governance in a State Takeover

Taking over individual schools at the request of a district would be a new role for virtually any state. States would need to design a new governance structure in order to oversee and implement the process. At the top of the governance system, there would need to be an entity with oversight responsibility. Similar to a board of directors in a corporate structure, the oversight body would be a decision-making entity charged with planning the effort and with selecting, monitoring, and evaluating the intervention methods.

State restructuring governance bodies may be more effective if they are as follows:

- Representative of stakeholders
- Independent of local interests in the district
- Knowledgeable about interventions and improvement in low-performing schools
- Allowed enough planning time (a few months during the summer is not enough)

- Tough enough to withstand political heat in pursuit of better schools
- Sensitive to local concerns and willing to listen and collaborate with cooperative groups

In addition to appointing an oversight body, each state that has experience with district and school takeovers also has created an office that supports the oversight body. This office assumes responsibility for the day-to-day work associated with running the takeover process.

However, states may lack capacity and funding to provide this kind of working group. State-level activity of this kind often is more effective than housing such a working group within a district. Staff members must be capable of managing a complex process and committed to the overall goals of the takeover. Being fair, transparent with accountability data, and funded to have adequate staff are important factors for this function.



- **Anticipated support for—and resistance to—dramatic change.** Groups that are committed to student learning first and foremost should be allowed greater input and be kept well informed during the decision process. Those who resist change at all (e.g., “there is no problem; these students are too poor to learn,” or “this is not solvable with restructuring”), or who have pressing agendas that conflict with students in low-performing schools should have less involvement.
- **Availability of resources.** Stakeholders who express interest in providing resources—technical, financial, or other—should be kept well informed, particularly about matters of interest to them. But even those with much to offer should not be allowed to steer restructuring decisions away from a student achievement-focused path.

Passionate stakeholders can either make or break a restructuring effort. In fact, not seeking stakeholder input has derailed some school restructuring efforts. However, allowing stakeholders to control rather than contribute to school change decisions can derail restructuring efforts. Even well-intended stakeholders can prevent changes that would help students in low-performing schools when they do the following:

- Fight changes that are unfamiliar or that do not fit preexisting ideas about how schools should improve (e.g., favoring incremental rather than dramatic change)
- Advocate for one subgroup of students at the expense of others
- Advocate for groups of adults—such as community groups, school staff, unions, or business groups—even when positions conflict with what is best for students

- Resist changes in school leadership and governance because the loss of those relationships may reduce stakeholder power, if only temporarily
- Slow and eventually stall the restructuring process by killing community support and deflecting school or district leader attention to media relations
- Failing to provide essential support or changes for restructured schools

The key is to involve stakeholders appropriately to benefit, not prevent, successful change. The text box, “Involving Stakeholders in the Restructuring Process,” lists strategies that can facilitate as well as discourage stakeholder participation.

The tool, “Restructuring Stakeholder Planner,” (page 70) poses a series of questions designed to help you determine possible stakeholders, their level of participation, and possible roles and responsibilities. Information gleaned from this tool is summarized in the tool, “Restructuring Stakeholder Summary,” (page 73). Used together, these tools can help you understand stakeholder perspectives and assign different modes of involvement to different stakeholders.

A Look at Successful Restructuring

San Diego Unified School District

The following vignette features how the San Diego Unified (SDU) School District involved stakeholders. It focuses on the district’s creation of restructuring teams at each school, inclusion of the community in the change effort, and outreach to community-based organizations.

In 2004, SDU had eight schools that, despite years of program improvement efforts, continued to fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). These schools were required to restructure under NCLB. San Diego Unified developed a plan to involve key stakeholders in the restructuring process. The

For More Information

San Diego Unified School District

Reports

Hassel, B. C., & Hassel, E. A. (n.d.). *Starting fresh in low-performing schools: Engaging parents and the community in starting fresh*. Chicago: National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/Start_Fresh_Book_2.pdf

Williams, J., & Bersin, A. (2006, November 28). Extreme makeover: Two failing San Diego schools get new start as charters. *Education Sector*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.educationsector.org/analysis/analysis_show.htm?doc_id=428171

School Documents

San Diego Unified, Plan for Schools Subject to School Restructuring Under the No Child Left Behind Act (www.ecs.org/html/meetingsEvents/CharterSchoolsNov2004/docs/San%20Diego%20Restructuring%20Plan.doc)

Request for Proposals
from San Diego Unified
School District (www.ecs.org/html/meetingsEvents/CharterSchoolsNov2004/docs/San%20Diego%20RFP.doc)



district developed workgroups at each school, requested proposals from local organizations interested in taking over and managing one or more of the schools, and organized a special committee to advise the district’s superintendent on the restructuring options most likely to result in improved student achievement.

At each of the schools, the district created a School Restructuring Workgroup consisting of parents, staff, and community members. The district tasked the workgroups with gathering information about each of the restructuring options and deciding

Involving Stakeholders in the Restructuring Process

Strategies That Support Involvement

- Informing and getting input from people with a passionate interest in schools and students
- Empowering those who support major change
- Using supporters to convince others in the community to give change a chance
- Convincing naysayers with Year 1 results on a limited number of top-priority goals
- Communicating a commitment to continued restructuring until students are learning, and not giving up on students because of vocal naysayers

Strategies That Discourage Involvement

- Ignoring stakeholders or leaving them out of the process entirely
- Allowing stakeholders to influence or control restructuring in ways that diminish potential learning results for students
- Pretending that all restructured schools will succeed the first time
- Giving in or returning to failed status quo when the first restructuring effort does not work



which approach was best for meeting their school's challenges. The workgroups gathered information from various sources: parent and teacher input during schoolwide meetings, presentations from the district, and school performance data. Together, workgroup members sifted through the options and created plans for their schools. The process gave voice to parents and community members who had felt alienated from school operations and reportedly contributed to healing some of the resentment people felt toward their failing community schools. Efforts to include all voices—including making sure interpreters were present during meetings—brought more people into the process. With this new opportunity to be involved in school reform, family and community members responded in the hundreds, eager to support their schools.

In addition to workgroups seeking input from members of the school community and beyond, the district requested proposals from local universities, charter management operators, and community organizations to outline their visions for these schools. Some organizations sought to be involved—San Diego University agreed to a partnership with

Keiller Middle School if it reopened as a charter, and the Chavez Charter Management Organization wanted to manage King Elementary School. But many organizations did not respond to the request, daunted by the short timelines—only a couple of months—to prepare charter applications, and tensions between the pro-charter superintendent and vocal pro-union people during the school board campaign.

Despite the tensions and challenges, four schools restructured as charter schools after board approval. Other schools made less dramatic restructuring plans via Option 5 under NCLB's restructuring options. Some schools focused on specific challenges they faced, including: overcoming the gap between English learners and their native English speaking peers, providing intensive professional development for teachers to decrease attrition, and reorganizing instructional time to emphasize trouble areas and reintroduce subjects—such as the arts—that had been reduced in the curriculum.

To date, the eight schools that have restructured have had mixed results. Some, like Keiller and King-

Chavez have been successful, turning their schools around and exiting restructuring status. Others continue to fail to make AYP and need to take additional steps to reform. But San Diego's initial coordinated effort to involve all interested parties, martial the support of local organizations, and take a coherent, unified step toward restructuring is a model worth replicating.

Preparing for Further Action

By now, you—as well as the initial members of the district restructuring team—have successfully completed the following:

- Formed a district restructuring team
- Assessed your district's capacity to oversee big changes in failing schools
- Determined how various stakeholders should be included in deciding what to do about schools where too few students are learning
- Decided whether to add other stakeholders to your district restructuring team

It is time to make sure that your entire district restructuring team is ready to begin performing the tasks. A little time spent now will help ensure that you make good decisions and follow up with action. There are four major decisions to make about your district team:

- What are the leadership roles on the district restructuring team?
- Will you involve external experts or facilitators?
- What process will you use to stay informed and make decisions as a team?
- What is your standing agenda for meetings?

A brief discussion of these follows.

What Are the Leadership Roles on the District Restructuring Team?

This decision may have been made by the superintendent. If not, now is the time to decide. Who is ultimately accountable for making sure that the team is working well and accomplishing the objective of speedy, high-quality decisions about each failing school?

In many cases, this will be the person charged with organizing the team in the first place, perhaps someone appointed by and reporting to the superintendent. In other cases, this role might change over time. But at all times, it is critical to know who is accountable for ensuring that your team meets its mission and making changes if it is not.

A deputy or assistant superintendent, a curriculum director, or another senior district staff member may be the right person. Position alone is not enough, however. Strong team leadership skills are essential to keep the district team motivated, informed, and productive through a challenging change process. In some cases, a credible outsider who is familiar with the district schools may be the best choice.

The superintendent may be a member of this working team or, in a smaller district, may lead it. However, this should be a true working team, and time constraints may prevent some superintendents from playing this role. Instead, teams with full support of and a direct reporting relationship to the superintendent can be just as effective as those led by the superintendent. If the superintendent appoints a representative, this person should be fully empowered and obligated to perform on the team, and not just act as a note taker. In any case, the superintendent is a critical stakeholder who will have ultimate decision-making authority about what restructuring options will be presented to the school board.

Will You Involve External Experts or Facilitators?

You may choose to involve one or more external experts. Typically, these individuals are chosen because they thoroughly understand the various restructuring options. Sometimes they are chosen because they can help facilitate and maintain momentum throughout the decision-making process.

What Process Will You Use to Stay Informed and Make Decisions as a Team?

Ground norms can help to ensure that team members participate efficiently and effectively. Take time to set these norms with the group. Questions to guide the effort include:

- When should you meet and how often?
- Who will schedule meetings? How?
- What do you need in advance and who will provide it?
- Who will collect and distribute additional agenda items and supporting material?
- Are standing meetings mandatory? What happens if someone does not attend? Will you still be able to make decisions?
- Who will facilitate the meetings to ensure that you prioritize and address all critical agenda items?
- How will you make decisions—by consensus, vote, or other?
- Under what circumstances will you make decisions outside of group meetings? How?

Through e-mail? Are there some decisions that require discussion?

- Who is responsible for communicating decisions to those who cannot attend?
- What will you do if you disagree with a decision?
- What information will you share through e-mail?
- Are there other issues to be addressed?

What Is Your Standing Agenda for Meetings?

The restructuring process will move quickly and no two meetings are likely to be the same. Even so, a standing agenda will help your team cover essentials. Items to consider include the following:

- Updates from each member on work in progress (school teams, provider, or leader recruiting)
- New issues or problems
- Preparatory work to be identified and assigned for next meeting
- Others who need to be informed of decisions made at this meeting (e.g., superintendent, stakeholders)
- Items from this meeting that need to be documented as part of the process

Use the Tool, “Meeting Action Planner,” (page 74) to help ensure that your team’s decisions lead to action. You might use this in lieu of minutes to keep the focus on decisions and action.



Restructuring Team Checklist

Qualifications to consider for your total working team include people with...

A Drive for Results

- A record of implementing change despite political and practical barriers
- An unyielding belief that all students—no matter how disadvantaged—can learn
- Organizing and planning skills to keep the decision-making process and implementation for each failing school on track

Relationship and Influence Skills

- Good relationships with a wide range of district staff, parents, and community organizations
- Willingness and ability to disagree with others politely, a “thick skin”
- Teamwork skills to complete tasks responsibly and support team members
- Strong influence skills

Readiness for Change

- An open mind about ways to improve student learning
- Willingness to learn about what kinds of big changes work under differing circumstances (see, for example, the *What Works When* summaries in the Appendix of this guide)
- Willingness to try new restructuring strategies
- No political agenda that may interfere with student learning-centered decisions

Knowledge to Do What Works (or willingness to acquire it quickly)

- Knowledge of the formal and informal district decision-making processes
- Knowledge of past district efforts to change and improve schools
- Knowledge of education management and effective schools research, with a focus on what has been proven to produce learning results with disadvantaged students



Assessing the District's Capacity to Lead Change

A Guided Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats Analysis

Instructions: Indicate whether each factor is an internal strength or internal weakness. What external changes might pose an opportunity to make this a strength? What external changes might make this a weakness?

| Factor | Strength. We have this or already do this: | Weakness. This is a weakness but we could improve if: | Opportunity. If these external changes occur, this could be a strength: | Threat. If these external changes occur, this could be a weakness: |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Team Staff <i>Our district has staff qualified for a restructuring team.</i> | | | | |
| Will <i>Our district is willing to take extreme action in failing schools (e.g., letting go of staff members who cannot succeed with failing students).</i> | | | | |
| Outsiders <i>Our district is willing to bring in outsiders if needed for student learning (e.g., to lead turnarounds, to manage schools).</i> | | | | |
| Insiders <i>We are willing to require central staff to make many changes to support restructured schools.</i> | | | | |
| Freedom to Act <i>Our district is willing to give capable leaders unprecedented freedom to change, even if this creates inconsistency and inconvenience.</i> | | | | |

TOOL



District Behavior Shifts to Enable Success

| Old District Behaviors | Behaviors for Successful Restructuring of Failing Schools |
|--|--|
| District staff members focus on compliance with current policies (since they work for most schools and students). | District staff members focus on measuring learning results and regular major restructuring of failing schools. |
| Administrators are chosen for complying with rules, getting along personally. | Administrators chosen for getting results, influencing others to change. |
| District departments stick to previous practices, even if misaligned with changes elsewhere in the district. | District departments work together to make the changes restructured schools need for student learning. |
| School goals are set to be achievable by more students—to maintain public support for public schools. | Goals are set based on what students need to know, think, and do for personal, economic, and civic success; these goals increase and change. |
| Lets some schools fail many students for many years if explained by student population. | Sets and sticks to school goals, including improvement timelines; failure leads to major restructuring. |
| Willing to try a change to improve—if teachers, parents, community agree. | Willing to make dramatic changes to help more students learn—even if teachers, parents, or others disagree. |
| New research about what works for learning used if not offensive to interest groups or difficult to organize; practices that do not work discarded only after careful study. | New research about what works adopted regularly, with bias toward well-conducted studies; practices discarded quickly if they do not show measurable learning results. |
| Provides help and support to schools upon request; or district provides the same help to all schools, regardless of their particular needs. | Help and support always given, always targeted at improvement needs of individual schools. |
| Student achievement goals are too hard or too easy; rewards, recognition, and consequences for schools are unfair (or not used). | Goals are challenging but achievable; rewards, recognition, and consequences flow from goals. |
| Poor measurement of student learning is used to excuse failing students and schools; measurement is limited to legally required content. | Improving learning measurement continuously is part of the core work of the district and the schools; measurement includes all content valued by the district and schools. |
| Extra money for failing schools is used to do even more of what is already being done. | Extra money for failing schools is used to introduce restructuring; strategies that work well and fast are given more funding. |



Restructuring Stakeholder Planner

1. Fill in the names of the people completing the tool and the date of your final version.
2. Indicate the level for which you are planning—district or school.
3. Look at your list of stakeholders in the first column of the first section of this tool. Discuss and record how you will include various stakeholders on the second page of this tool. [Note: You may or may not want to add stakeholders to your district working team; it may be less effective with more than seven members.]
4. Summarize your decisions in the column “All Stakeholders’ Roles” on the Tool, “Restructuring Stakeholder Summary,” that immediately follows this planning tool.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Organization Level: District School

| Stakeholders | Expected Stakeholder Reactions to Restructuring | Ways to Include Without Preventing Successful Restructuring |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Example: Teachers</i> | <i>Fear of job loss; fear of another unsuccessful change</i> | <i>Reps on school advisory team; survey input by all teachers; keep all informed</i> |
| Principals | | |
| Teachers | | |
| Other school staff | | |
| District staff | | |
| District administrators | | |
| Students | | |
| Parents | | |
| Special education and ELL advocates | | |
| Community groups (list) | | |
| Teachers’ union | | |
| School board | | |
| Experts | | |
| Other | | |

Continued



Restructuring Stakeholder Planner (continuation)

Who will participate on school teams to recommend restructuring strategy?

| Stakeholder group | All, or representatives? | How are representatives chosen? |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Example: Teachers</i> | <i>Two representatives</i> | <i>Vote of staff in each school, to be conducted by principals by June 5</i> |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Who else will have input (e.g., through public forums, private meetings, surveys)?

| Stakeholder group | All, or representatives? | How are representatives chosen? | How, when is input obtained? |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Example: Teachers</i> | <i>All</i> | <i>N/A</i> | <i>Forums at schools</i> |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Continued



Restructuring Stakeholder Planner (continuation)

Who has final decision authority about restructuring method for each school?

| Stakeholder group | All, or representatives? | How are representatives chosen? |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Example: Teachers | District working team representatives; superintendent has final say | Superintendent to choose from those recommended by principals (see above) |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Who else will we keep informed of restructuring decisions and progress?

| Stakeholder group | All, or representatives? | How are representatives chosen? | How are they kept informed? |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Example: Teachers | All | N/A | Forums at schools |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Do we need to include additional stakeholders on the district restructuring team?

| Stakeholder group | How many representatives? | How are representatives chosen? |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Example: Teachers | Two representatives districtwide | Superintendent to choose from those recommended by principals |
| | | |
| | | |

TOOL

Restructuring Stakeholder Summary

Use this tool to complete a stakeholder plan.

1. Fill in the names of the people completing the tool and the date.
2. Indicate the level for which you are planning (district, school, or subgroup within a school).
3. Review the list of possible stakeholders in the far left column.
4. Use the information from the tool, “Restructuring Stakeholder Planner,” to decide how you will involve various stakeholders. Record your decisions here, or use this as a checklist to ensure that you have planned for all important stakeholders.

Team: _____ Date: _____

Organization Level: District School Subgroup

| Stakeholders | Representatives' Role(s) in Restructuring Decisions | All Stakeholders' Roles |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Example: Teachers</i> | <i>Two representatives chosen by vote of staff in each school to participate on school-level teams</i> | <i>Initial input through survey; keep informed in monthly e-mails and staff announcements</i> |
| Principals | | |
| Teachers | | |
| Other school staff | | |
| District staff | | |
| District administrators | | |
| Students | | |
| Parents | | |
| Special education and ELL advocates | | |
| Community groups (list) | | |
| Teachers' union | | |
| School board | | |
| Experts | | |
| Other | | |



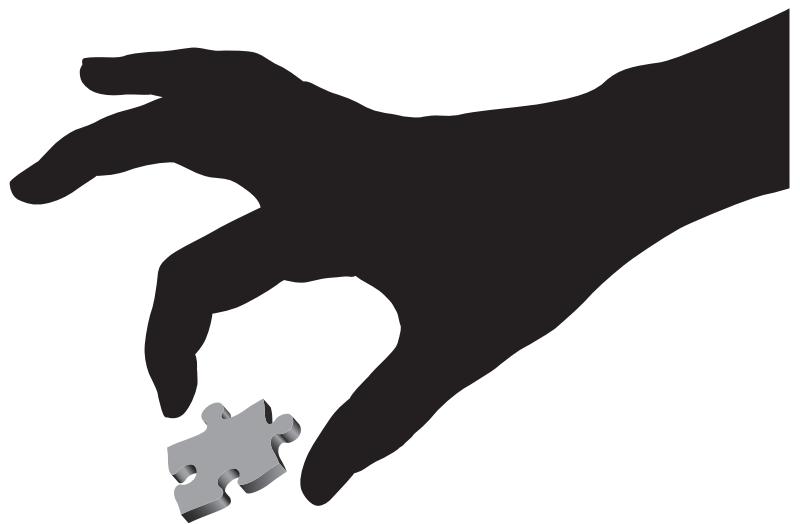
Meeting Action Planner

Complete each row for action steps where you are assigning specific accountability. E-mail or copy and distribute this to all team members after each meeting.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

| Action Step | By Whom | With Help From | Status Report Due | Deadline |
|---|---|---|-------------------|------------------|
| <i>Example: Get superintendent's approval of our recommended school staff members to serve on district restructuring team; invite new members to join</i> | <i>Jill M. (team leader assigned by superintendent)</i> | <i>Jack L. (principal assigned to team)</i> | <i>One week</i> | <i>Two weeks</i> |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Chapter 8



Step 2: Choosing the Right Changes

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Step 2: Choosing the Right Changes

This step includes organizing your school-level decision-making process, conducting a school-by-school restructuring analysis, and making final restructuring decisions across the district. Step 2 tasks include:

- Planning the process
- Analyzing failure and determining when focused changes may work
- Choosing among restructuring options
- Making final restructuring decisions across the district

Planning the Process

The process of choosing a restructuring strategy rivals the strategy itself in importance for successful change. Involving school teams—with the current school leader, staff, parents, and others who have a large stake in each school’s success—in decisions about the school can help you make better informed decisions and reduce resistance to dramatic changes. School team members may have important information about the causes and nuances of school performance, and their input is important.

Two ways to involve school teams include the following:

- **Input.** The district team convenes school focus groups to get input about the school’s particular situation. The analysis of each school’s situation is done by the district team using this and other input.
- **Analysis and recommendations.** The district team convenes school restructuring

teams that are charged with analyzing school situations and recommending a restructuring strategy to the district team and superintendent. The district team then assesses the recommendations of all failing schools across the district. The district team makes changes in the recommendations as needed to fit the district’s capacity for managing the different types of restructuring.

The text box, “Involving School Teams,” shows the steps for both of these processes.

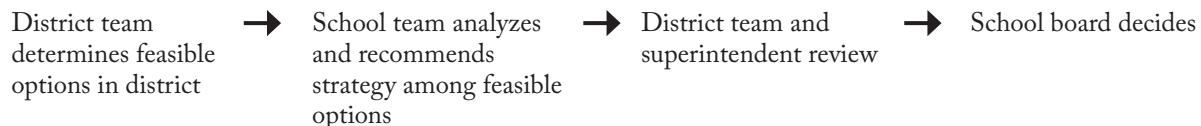
These are not the only possible processes, and each district will want to design its own unique process to fit its situation. Whether the school teams are used for input, or for analysis and recommendations, a district team member will need to facilitate and/or participate on each school team.

During any process, input may be sought from other stakeholders who are not team members. In particular, other school staff members may have information and insights that would inform restructuring decisions. Clarify how staff can contribute ideas (e.g., through focus groups, e-mail or paper surveys, or by invitation at an all-staff meeting). The district team also may keep staff and other stakeholders informed along the way.

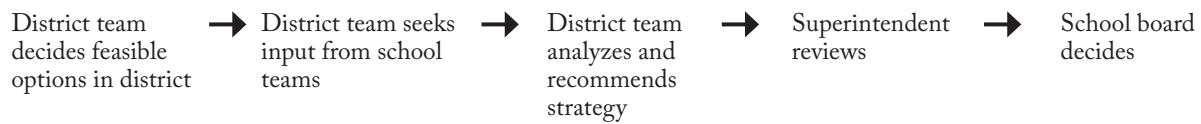
In most instances, the superintendent, with support of the district team, will present recommendations to the school board. Generally, the school board will have the final say. The more agreement between the district team, school team, and other

Involving School Teams

Obtaining Input



Analyzing Recommendations



stakeholders, the more likely a school board will be to accept the recommendations.

The remainder of this guide assumes that either the district restructuring team or school restructuring teams will analyze each school's needs. The district team initially narrows the options for school teams to those that are feasible. If only certain strategies are acceptable and feasible from the district's perspective, then these are the only ones that school teams should consider. For example, chartering is possible only when a charter law exists in the state.

The district team also reviews school team recommendations from a districtwide perspective. For example, a district might have only three high-potential turnaround leaders at hand, but have 10 failing schools that want to try turnarounds. In this case, the district decides which schools have the

best odds of turnaround success and whether to attempt other restructuring strategies in the remaining schools or wait until more turnaround leaders are available.

Even though various stakeholders are included in restructuring decisions, in most cases the superintendent and the district restructuring team will present the recommendations to the school board.

Analyzing Failure and Determining When Focused Changes May Work

Choosing the right restructuring strategy is critical to effect successful, dramatic learning improvements. There are many factors large and small, that contribute to the success or failure of each strategy. However, each restructuring strategy

has prerequisites without which failure is almost certain.

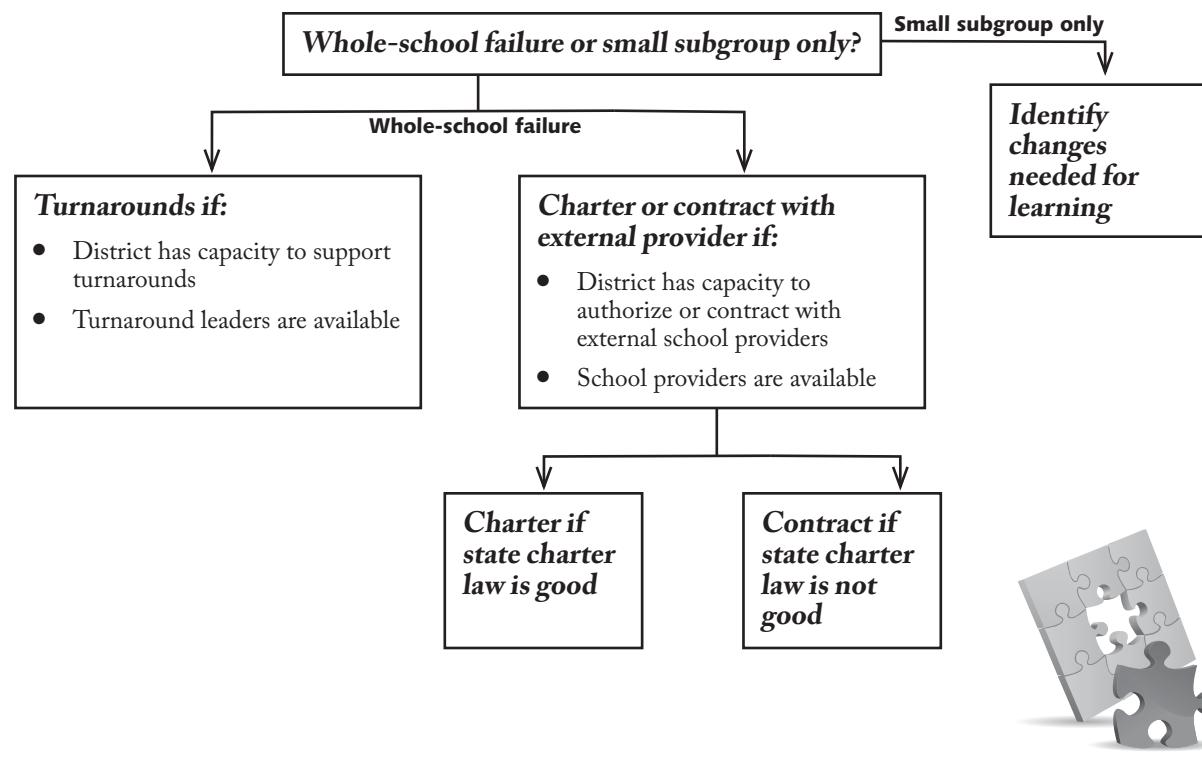
The text box, “School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree,” focuses on the school-level elements of restructuring and presents a way to think about the major options for restructuring a failing school. It does not include state takeovers. This is a decision that should be made either before school-level decisions for the entire restructuring process are made or at the end if the district determines it lacks capacity to oversee restructuring implementation for all affected schools in the district. [Note: If you are restructuring a school under NCLB, you must choose one of the five restructuring options stated in the law.]

Whole-School Versus Small Subgroup Failure

Sometimes a school fails (e.g., does not make AYP under NCLB) by not meeting the learning needs of students in one small subgroup. The first step in such a case is identifying what those students need that the school is not providing.

In some cases, whole-school restructuring will make sense because the changes that are needed for one group of students—higher expectations or closer monitoring of progress, for example—are in fact changes that all of the school’s students need. Schools that are consistently effective with all subgroups have common characteristics, as discussed in the introduction section of this guide.

School-Level Restructuring Decision Tree



In other cases, a major change specific to one group of students (e.g., a longer school day, personal coaches in the classroom) and leadership to bring about such a change may be needed. Even a dramatic change in school practices that affects one small subgroup alone may not address whole-school restructuring. However, organizations are slow to change when most students are already well served. Restructuring may be essential to effect real change for any subgroup that is left out.

The team first decides whether many definable groups of students in a school are not learning, or whether one small subgroup is failing to learn. If the school is failing to meet the needs of only one small subgroup, then a determination will need to be made about what specific changes are needed. If those changes can be implemented without dramatically changing whole-school routines, then this may be enough. Whole-school restructuring most likely will be needed if such changes have been tried already, or if these changes affect whole-school routines.

Factors such as group size and uniqueness may help your team determine when whole-school restructuring is needed to improve the learning of a small subgroup. The severity of the subgroup's needs—and thus the magnitude of changes needed—also may affect your restructuring decision.

The tool, “Whole-School or Focused Restructuring?” (page 88) will guide you through a school-level analysis, including the following factors:

- **Percentage and number of students failing in each subgroup by subject.** If only one small subgroup of students is failing, then big changes focused on that subgroup may work. If many subgroups are failing or if one large subgroup is failing, whole-school restructuring will be needed.
- **Severity of failure and indicators of low performance.** If failing students are learning very little, whole-school restructuring is more likely to be needed.

Your district will decide which performance indicator(s) to use (e.g., average scaled scores, the percentage of students making grade level, learning progress scores, or a combination). The indicators you use will depend on how student testing data are reported in your state.

- **Uniqueness of subgroup needs.** A subgroup's learning needs may be met with focused changes rather than whole-school restructuring if the necessary instructional, scheduling, curricular, or other changes can be made without changing whole-school practices. But if these changes have been tried and the school has had difficulty implementing them, then whole-school restructuring may be needed nonetheless.

[Note: Large, focused changes for one subgroup would fall into the NCLB Option 5: Other category. Such changes must be fundamental and major.]

A Look at Successful Restructuring

Chicago Public Schools

The following vignette of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) relates to the following sections in Step 2:

- Choosing among restructuring options
- Making the final restructuring decisions

The vignette focuses on trying different approaches, analyzing what works, and changing approaches based on efficacy.

In the mid 1990s, the state legislature gave the Chicago mayor control of CPS by allowing him to begin appointing the school board. Ravaged by financial mismanagement and poor academic leadership, CPS had systematically failed to educate its students, and hundreds of schools were designated as “underperforming.” The mayor wanted to create an education system that actively explored diverse approaches, identified what worked, scaled up successes, and ended failed efforts in a timely manner. The mayor wanted to explore options including:

- Closing chronically failing schools
- Turning around some existing schools
- Opening new schools to transform public education in Chicago

The mayor hired a new chief executive officer (CEO) of CPS in 2001 to create the best urban school system in the country. One of the new CEO's early efforts was to identify three school buildings for closure due to low performance. By closing these persistently low-performing schools, he wanted to send a message throughout the system that failure was not an option. The closures met with resistance from the teachers' unions, families, and city politicians. In Chicago, as elsewhere, closing schools is politically tricky and does not win friends. Both the mayor and the CEO realized that in a city with hundreds of underperforming schools, closing three schools was unlikely to create the dramatic changes they wanted for the students of Chicago. They decided to seek more information on the specific needs of communities throughout the city.

To gather more information on the school needs of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods, the CEO hired the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF) to conduct an analysis of school performance and enrollment patterns in Chicago's 77 neighborhood areas. The goal was to identify how many neighborhoods and students had a "performing" school. A performing school was defined as an elementary school in which at least 40 percent of the students performed at or above grade level, or a high school in which at least 30 percent did so. IFF's report, *Here and Now*, brought to light that many of Chicago's neighborhoods were woefully underserved by their local schools; nine of the neighborhoods did not have a single performing school despite relatively low expectations for achievement. In the 25 community areas with the greatest need, there were 197 elementary schools included in IFF's study; only 34 qualified as performing. To bring quality schools to these and other communities, the mayor announced in June of 2004 his Renaissance 2010 plan,

For More Information Chicago Public Schools

Reports

Kneebone, E. (2004). *Here and now*. Chicago: Illinois Facilities Fund. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.iff.org/resources/content/1/4/7/documents/cpsfullreport.pdf>

New Leaders for New Schools (2008). *Key insights of the urban excellence framework*. New York: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.nlns.org/documents/NewLeadersReport-Version3.0-FINAL.pdf>

Websites

Renaissance 2010 (<http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/>)

The Catalyst-Chicago (<http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/index.php>)

Newspaper Articles

Karp, S., & Myers, J. (2008, December 15). Duncan's track record. *Catalyst Chicago*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=2514&cat=5>

Richards, C., & Harris, R. (2008, January 24). Leaders name for high school turnarounds. *Catalyst Chicago*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/news/index.php?item=2340&cat=30>



an initiative to open 100 new schools in Chicago by 2010.

To manage the portfolio of new schools, Chicago created the Office of New Schools (ONS). The ONS took on oversight of the existing charter and professional development schools as well as the new schools opened under the Renaissance 2010 initiative. Soon after it was created, the ONS released a request for school proposals, encouraging educational entrepreneurs to open up innovative

schools across Chicago, particularly in the areas that had been identified as needing better performing schools. The new schools initiative had, as of 2008, resulted in the opening of 76 new schools; 42 were in the communities with the greatest need.

Supplementing the new schools initiative was a turnaround effort CPS began in eight persistently low-performing schools. The Chief Education Officer of CPS oversaw six of these turnaround schools. CPS contracted with the nonprofit Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) to run the other two turnaround schools. CPS cited AUSL's success with Dodge Renaissance Academy. The principals in these turnaround schools received special turnaround training, additional resources, and other supports from the district and outside providers. If these early efforts result in dramatically improved student performance, CPS may increase the number of turnaround-designated schools in the district in the coming years.

Although results have been mixed in school reform efforts across Chicago, one of the key strengths of the city's approach is the fact that the system's leaders have diversified the district's school reform tactics by trying several new approaches, seeing what works, expanding promising tactics, and doing fewer of the things that do not produce improved learning for students.

Choosing Among Restructuring Options

Once you have decided which schools are in need of whole-school restructuring, you will need to choose a strategy for each of those schools. In some cases, district-level factors will be the main determinant, whereas in other cases school-level factors may hold more weight. In all cases, you will need to make a clear decision about which restructuring strategy to pursue in each school.

Each restructuring option was described in earlier chapters. If you are restructuring under NCLB, additional information on each option is available in the Appendix of this guide. If you have not done so, review this information with the team. Knowledge of the various options is essential as you work through determining whether one of them will meet your restructuring needs. Use the following subsections to help guide the team in considering the appropriateness of each option.

Considering Turnarounds

The most important factor in turnaround success is the presence of a capable turnaround leader who takes the well-documented steps that make turnarounds work. The tool, "Do You Have Turnaround Leaders?" (page 90) summarizes the characteristics and common actions of successful turnaround leaders. Your district team or school team can use this tool to determine whether known (or high-potential) turnaround leaders exist among your current staff (e.g., teachers, assistant principals, principals, or district administrators).

Successful turnaround leaders are quite different from leaders in already well-performing organizations. Even a very successful principal in a school that has been performing well for some time may not possess the qualities of a successful turnaround leader. Across industries, turnaround leaders tend to be specialists; they are driven to make big changes, many of which are welcome only when prior performance in the organization has been very low.

If a turnaround leader is available to a school, then the next question is whether your district has the governance capacity to support turnarounds. If your district is able to provide turnaround leaders for one or more schools, then you will need to assess whether it has the capacity to support one or more successful turnaround schools.

In a turnaround, the school will be trying new and different tactics that may differ from standard district policy and practice. Keep in mind that current practices that may work fine for many students may not work for all students in the schools that need restructuring. And despite the best of intentions, organizations of all kinds, not just schools, have difficulty making exceptions. Even if district leadership is on board for change, other district staff whose support will be needed by turnaround schools may not understand why such big and inconvenient changes are necessary. And even if the vast majority of staff members in the school are ready and willing to make changes needed for success, a small number of staff members may not be.

Successful turnarounds—when organizations go from bad to great—do not typically include broad-scale replacement of staff. Turnarounds are one of the best options for achieving dramatically better results with minimal impact on teachers who could be solid performers under the right leadership. However, this approach requires first and foremost a school leader with the right capabilities to make it happen.

It is essential for turnaround leaders who have demonstrated success in the first year to have the authority to remove the typically small number of staff members who have not made needed changes. In a successful turnaround—when nearly all teachers are showing newfound success in the classroom—it often becomes clear which few teachers are not a good fit and are unlikely to perform well.

Other staff members in the school will have made enormous changes to achieve significantly better student learning. Completion and maintenance of the turnaround will require that low-performing teachers exit the school through in-district transfers or removal from their positions.

In districts operating under a collective bargaining agreement, this issue will be challenging. Ideally, the

district would negotiate waivers to allow needed transfers or removals. This may take advance planning and some time to negotiate. Factors that may affect timing and success include the contracting cycle, the strength of the district-union relationship, and the union's perspective on very low-performing teachers. Keep in mind that the alternatives for successful, whole-school restructuring—such as chartering and contracting—are likely to result in significantly more staff changes than are successful turnarounds.

These and other factors make it important for you to assess district capacity for supporting turnaround schools before you try this strategy. While a terrific turnaround leader can improve school results dramatically without much support from the district, such improvements typically are not sustained or replicated without changes by the district.

The tool, “District Capacity to Support Turnarounds,” (page 93) will help you assess conditions that may affect turnaround success in your district. School teams will need significant input from the district to assess these conditions. The district team may want to eliminate turnarounds as an option if one or more of these conditions may be impossible to meet.

Considering Chartering or Contracting with External Providers

Contracting and chartering are ways of starting fresh, which means closing and reopening each failing school in some fashion. There are three basic ways for a district to start fresh with a school:

- Authorizing a charter school run by an external provider
- Contracting out for school management by an external provider
- Restarting or reconstituting the school with a completely new staff, leader, tools, and rules

[Note: District-managed restarts or reconstitutions have had a poor track record and may be more successful following a turnaround model.]

As with all restructuring efforts, chartering and contracting also are not always successful. Numerous conditions needed for success were described in Section I of this guide. A discussion of key factors to be considered follows.

School provider supply. An adequate supply of providers who can find and manage an entrepreneurial school leader for each school is critical. In many cases, your district will not know whether strong providers are available to manage contract and charter schools until you have tried to recruit them. Districts that want to increase local capacity to restart schools should form a long-term plan to recruit and train entrepreneurial school leaders and teams. Districts also may plan ahead to meet the conditions required by successful national or regional charter and contract school providers that are seeking to replicate their success. These actions will not address the short-term shortage of providers, but they can help build a pipeline that, with time, will supply your district with enough high-quality providers to handle your charter and contract schools.

Filling teacher positions also is an issue faced by fresh-start schools. In most cases, some number of committed teachers from previously failing schools would achieve better results with new leadership in a fresh-start school. When chartering, staffing decisions typically are left entirely to the charter school provider. Under contracting, this is a point of negotiation with each provider.

District capacity. Chartering and contracting require district capacity to manage the relationship with one or more providers. Many districts that would find it hard to make a slew of exceptions for district-managed turnaround schools will find it easier to give schools the needed

freedom to do things differently through a charter or contract. However, good authorizing—as it is called in chartering—and contracting are not always so simple. The tool, “District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting,” (page 95) will help you assess your capacity to support one or more schools run by external providers.

State charter laws. Good state charter laws are ones that do the most to allow, support, and replicate successful charter schools while preventing growth or replication of unsuccessful ones schools. Before you charter, you will want to ensure that your state’s charter law maximizes the odds of success with failing students. The tool, “Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law?” (page 97) will help your team determine whether your state has a good charter law; one under which the school(s) you authorize are more likely to succeed. If not, then forming individual contracts with external providers is your best prospect for restructuring low-performing schools for which the turnaround conditions cannot be met. In such cases, the tool is still a useful guide to some of the key provisions to include in your contracts.

Under both chartering and contracting, the district maintains ultimate governance authority through the chartering or contracting process. If your state has a good charter law, then chartering is the simplest method for your district to delegate school management to external providers. A good charter law creates a preexisting framework that specifies the school’s autonomy, resources, and accountability. You do not have to generate all of this from scratch or work out case-by-case exceptions to district and state regulations.

If your state does not have a good charter law (or any charter law at all), then forming individual contracts with providers to manage failing schools is the alternative. Forming a good individual contract will take more work. Emulating good charter law provisions that enable schools to serve students well

Should You Charter or Contract?

In some states, a charter may be a less desirable instrument than a contract if, for example, charter schools in the state statutorily receive lower levels of per-pupil funding than school districts. In such a case, a contract arrangement could provide the fresh-start school with more resources. Some state charter school laws also require a lottery for all of a school's seats. For districts that want to give admission preference to the preexisting school's students, a contract also would likely be more appropriate than a charter. The following chart outlines the advantages and drawbacks of different forms of charter and contract relationships.

Chartering and Contracting Comparison

| Charter | Contract |
|--|--|
| <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provides school with statutory guarantee of autonomy and funding that can outlive the tenure of "friendly" district leaders and provide school with real legal protectionCompliments a district that may already have well-developed processes for granting charters and overseeing charter schools | <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provides a way to start fresh in states with no charter lawAllows district and school to tailor terms to specific circumstances (e.g., define the attendance boundary of the school)May not be subject to statutory caps on the number of charter schoolsMay sidestep statutory limits on charter per-pupil funding or access to facilities |
| <p>Drawbacks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">May not be an option in states without charter laws or in districts without chartering authorityMay fall under laws that cap the number of schools that can be chartered or limit the number of schools that can be operated under a single charterMay fall under laws that cap per-pupil charter funding at less than district funding and deny charter schools facilities funding | <p>Drawbacks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Does not provide school with statutory guarantee of autonomy and fundingMay have procurement laws and procedures that are unwieldy or that make it difficult to select best providersMay be prohibited or restricted by state law |

Note: The information for this chart is reprinted with permission from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. The source is Kowal, J. M., & Hassel, B. C. (2006). *Starting fresh in low-performing schools: Establishing the right relationship* (2nd ed.). Chicago: National Association of Charter School Authorizers.



also can help you form good noncharter contracts. If your state has a good charter law but you would like to make a more nuanced choice between chartering and contracting, the text box, “Should You Charter or Contract?” summarizes the pros and cons of chartering versus contracting.

Contracting with unionized staff. One controversial aspect of contract schools is the impact on unionized district staff. While protecting workers, collective bargaining contracts often conflict with EMO models and with practices proven to work with low-performing students, such as selection only of staff who agree with the EMO’s approach and longer school days. Districts choosing this option and keeping union staff will need to negotiate union contract waivers. In the ideal, a contractor will be ready and able to include on its staff capable teachers who are committed to the contractor’s approach and practices.

Making the Final Restructuring Decisions Across the District

Before your district team recommends restructuring strategies to your school board, you will want to review the implications of your decisions at the district level. Prior to making recommendations to the school board, each district team member should review the descriptions of the different restructuring options in the previous chapters to ensure that the district can address all of the conditions successfully. Look for conditions or issues that might take special effort to resolve in your district.

At the beginning of this process, your district team considered team and district readiness for managing large changes in failing schools. Another issue to consider is how many schools you are prepared to oversee through the various restructuring methods. If your district has limited capacity to execute your preferred restructuring options, a relative comparison of school performance and readiness

for chartering, contracting, or turnarounds can help you decide which schools are the highest priority candidates for direct restructuring. [Note: If you are restructuring under NCLB, some schools might be targeted for hybrid efforts under NCLB Option 5 for a year, but only if such efforts make fundamental changes in each school’s governance as required by law.]

As an alternative, you might reconsider turning over to the state those schools that need restructuring but are not the best restructuring candidates for the district. For example:

- A district might choose to restructure the just-miss schools directly and turn over the very lowest performing ones to the state.
- A district might feel comfortable with one restructuring strategy (such as turnarounds under new leaders), but not others (such as chartering and contracting).
- Schools that are not good candidates for turnarounds because of existing conditions or a limited number of turnaround leaders in the district might be turned over to the state.
- If the number of failing schools is simply too great for your district to govern through major change at once.

Keep in mind that the state must consent. In addition, you should be convinced that the state will be in a superior position to deliver big, speedy improvements to students in your district.

Reconstitutions in public schools generally have a poor track record. Stakeholder resistance to change; leaders without the necessary turnaround capabilities; lack of time to plan for and implement change; and constraints on school schedules, curriculum, staff hiring, and the like have prevented success in many cases. Districts that wish to consider reconstitutions should apply lessons from successful turnarounds. For example, reconstitutions and turnarounds have the same goal: achieving

significantly different results within a district-run school, but with some or all new staff. Staffing considerations include:

- An all-new staff may not be needed (and indeed may harm the effort) but a new leader typically is. If a strong turnaround leader is available but many staff members are not performing capably (showing grade-level achievement and progress) with any subset of students, then it makes sense to require all staff to reapply for their positions.
- Turnaround leaders create the conditions in which average teachers become better ones. However, if most of the current teachers are not able to be successful with any subset of students, then allow the turnaround leader to pick teachers who are more likely to be successful from the start. This may include some of the current teachers.

- Districts in which teacher shortages are acute may find reconstitutions impractical. Similarly, districts with collective bargaining agreements will likely find negotiating for transfer or firing of these very low-performing staff members much easier than negotiating for whole-school staff replacement under a reconstitution.

Articulating Final Recommendations for the School Board

Once you have settled on a restructuring strategy for each school, your team will need to prepare to defend it. Articulate the recommendations for each school, the major reasons for choosing them, and strategies to influence your school board to accept each recommendation. The tool, “Proposed Restructuring Strategies,” (page 98) can be used to organize the recommendations.



Whole-School or Focused Restructuring?

Use this tool to help you determine whether each school needs whole-school restructuring or focused changes to meet the needs of one small group of students. Use one page per school. Use this tool as a guideline; alter it to fit your needs and compare schools. Fill in the data for each failing school. Use results from state tests, National Assessment of Educational Progress, or other consistent data. Subgroup examples include race, income, special needs, or language needs. Indicate whether the school needs whole-school restructuring or focused changes.

School name: _____ Year of data: _____

Person(s) completing: _____ Date of completion: _____

| Subgroups Failing (List Subgroups Below) | % of This Subgroup Failing | # of Students Failing in This Subgroup | How Severe Is Subgroup Failure (High, Medium, or Low)? | How Unique Are Learning Needs of This Subgroup (High, Medium, or Low)? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|---|---|---|---|---|

Reading

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1. F/RL* students | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| Total (all students) | | | | |

Mathematics

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1. F/RL* students | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| Total (all students) | | | | |

Subjects

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1. F/RL* students | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| Total (all students) | | | | |

Continued



Whole-School or Focused Restructuring? (continuation)

Summary Totals of Students Failing at Least One Subject

| Subgroups Failing (List Subgroups Below) | % of This Subgroup Failing | # of Students Failing in This Subgroup | How Severe Is Subgroup Failure (High, Medium, or Low)? | How Unique Are Learning Needs of This Subgroup (High, Medium, or Low)? |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. F/RL* students | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| Total (all students) | | | | |

* Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (and possibly other meals).

This school needs whole-school restructuring

This school needs major, focused changes for these subgroups: _____



Do You Have Turnaround Leaders?

Assess each leader available to this school. Ask the following questions:

- Does the school's current principal or other available leader in the district have these competencies?
- Has he or she demonstrated these behaviors?
- Can you recruit for these competencies and behaviors?

School name: _____

Person(s) completing: _____ Date of completion: _____

Summarize your findings here:

We have a turnaround leader available to this school. Yes No

We can recruit additional turnaround leaders. Yes No

Possible in-district turnaround candidates:

Turnaround Leader Competencies: Successful turnaround leaders have broad skills. They combine the behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and incremental change leaders. The list of competencies was adapted from: Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley (pp. 199–236, 343).

| Competencies | Current Principal | Other Available District Principals | Can Recruit for This | Do Not Have and Cannot Recruit for This |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <i>Driving for results:</i> setting high goals, taking initiative, being relentlessly persistent to succeed | | | | |
| <i>Problem-solving:</i> using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems | | | | |
| <i>Showing confidence:</i> exhibiting confidence, using failure to initiate problem solving, and not excusing failure | | | | |
| <i>Ability to influence others:</i> influencing immediate action toward the school's goals | | | | |
| <i>Teamwork and cooperation:</i> getting input and keeping others informed | | | | |
| <i>Conceptual thinking:</i> connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum to clarify for all | | | | |

Continued



Do You Have Turnaround Leaders? (continuation)

| Competencies | Current Principal | Other Available District Principals | Can Recruit for This | Do Not Have and Cannot Recruit for This |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <i>Team leadership:</i> assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform despite challenges | | | | |
| <i>Organizational commitment:</i> making personal sacrifices needed for school success | | | | |
| <i>Communicating a compelling vision:</i> rousing staff to commit energy to the change | | | | |

Leadership Actions: The leader must take the right actions. These are the frequently documented actions leaders take in successful turnarounds. The best turnaround candidates will already have demonstrated many of these actions to make big changes.

| Major Actions by Successful Turnaround Leaders | Current Principal | Other Available District Principals | Can Recruit for This | Do Not Have and Cannot Recruit for This |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Concentrating on a few very important changes with big, fast payoffs | | | | |
| Implementing practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, even when they require deviations from district policies | | | | |

| Supporting Actions by Successful Turnaround Leaders | Current Principal | Other Available District Principals | Can Recruit for This | Do Not Have and Cannot Recruit for This |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Communicating a positive vision of future school results | | | | |
| Collecting and personally analyzing school and student performance data | | | | |
| Making an action plan based on data | | | | |
| Helping staff personally “see and feel” the problems students face | | | | |
| Getting key influencers within district and school to support major changes | | | | |

Continued



Do You Have Turnaround Leaders? (continuation)

| Supporting Actions by Successful Turnaround Leaders (continuation) | Current Principal | Other Available District Principals | Can Recruit for This | Do Not Have and Cannot Recruit for This |
|--|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Measuring and reporting progress frequently and publicly | | | | |
| Gathering staff often and requiring all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings | | | | |
| Funneling time and money into tactics that get results; halting unsuccessful tactics | | | | |
| Requiring all staff to change; not making it optional | | | | |
| Silencing change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes | | | | |
| Acting in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success | | | | |



District Capacity to Support Turnarounds

Note the extent to which your district has or can develop governance capacity to support turnaround schools. The more items that fall into the weakness or threat categories, the less likely schools are to achieve, maintain, and replicate successful turnarounds in your district.

| Creating the Environment | Strength. We Do This Well Already: | Weakness. This Is Unlikely in Our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways: | Opportunity. These Likely Changes in Our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This: | Threat. These Likely External Changes Would Harm Our Ability to Do This: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Freedom to act: We will allow turnaround schools to do things very differently even if this diminishes district efficiency and consistency. Turnaround schools may differ in areas such as curriculum, daily and annual schedule, discipline, teaching method, staff hiring, and management. | | | | |
| Accountability: We will set clear, high improvement goals for turnaround schools. We will monitor and publicly report school achievement and progress frequently. | | | | |
| Timetable: We will set short, clear timetables for turnaround schools to demonstrate broad improvements, typically in one year. We also will give turnaround leaders time to plan and prepare in advance. | | | | |
| Support that helps without hijacking: We will provide financial, technical, data, transportation, human resources, and other services as requested to support turnaround schools even when less efficient or inconsistent with other schools. | | | | |

Continued



District Capacity to Support Turnarounds (continuation)

| Creating the Environment | Strength. We Do This Well Already: | Weakness. This Is Unlikely in Our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways: | Opportunity. These Likely Changes in Our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This: | Threat. These Likely External Changes Would Harm Our Ability to Do This: |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Effective school practices: We accept that effective school practices may appear different for students who have not been successful learners in the past; we will accept these deviations rather than trying to fit turnaround schools into current practices (e.g., school day length, discipline policies, hiring practices). | | | | |
| Staffing: We will support turnaround leaders who have demonstrated Year 1 success by facilitating transfer or removal of teachers or staff who are unable or unwilling to make the same successful changes as other staff. We will seek union waivers to allow this. | | | | |
| Commitment: We are willing to re-structure the same school(s) again if a turnaround is not successful. | | | | |



District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting

Note the extent to which your district has or can develop governance capacity to contract or charter with external school providers. The more items that fall into the weakness or threat categories, the less likely contract and charter schools are to be successful in your district.

| Creating the Environment | Strength. We Do This Well Already: | Weakness. This Is Unlikely in Our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways: | Opportunity. These Likely Changes in Our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This: | Threat. These Likely External Changes Would Harm Our Ability to Do This: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rigorous selection: We will employ a systematic process that grants charters and contracts only to providers that are very likely to succeed because of the quality of their teams and plans. | | | | |
| Freedom to act: We will allow contract and charter schools to do things very differently and will clarify this in the contract or charter. These schools may differ in areas such as curriculum, daily and annual schedule, discipline, teaching method, use of funds, staff hiring, and management. | | | | |
| Accountability: We will set clear, high performance goals for charter and contract schools. We will monitor and publicly report school achievement and progress frequently. | | | | |
| Timetable: We will set short, clear time-tables for start-up schools to demonstrate broad improvements, typically in one year. We also will give providers time to plan and prepare in advance. | | | | |

Continued



District Capacity to Support Chartering and Contracting (continuation)

| Creating the Environment | Strength. We Do This Well Already: | Weakness. This Is Unlikely in Our District. To Do This, We Would Have to Change in These Ways: | Opportunity. These Likely Changes in Our External Environment Would Allow Us to Do This: | Threat. These Likely External Changes Would Harm Our Ability to Do This: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support that helps without hijacking: We will provide negotiated financial, technical, data, human resources, transportation, and other services to contract schools, even when less efficient or inconsistent with other schools. (This is less often necessary with charter schools than contract schools.) | | | | |
| Effective school practices: We will not require contract or charter schools to follow district practices in areas such as school day length, discipline policies, and hiring. | | | | |
| Staffing: While we may encourage charter or contract providers to rehire capable district staff (e.g., by providing resumes), we will allow them full discretion to hire only teachers who meet their hiring criteria. | | | | |
| Commitment: We are willing to shut down and restructure the same school(s) again if a fresh-start charter or contract effort is not successful. | | | | |



Does Your State Have a Good Charter Law?

1. Investigate your state's charter school law. Answer the following questions:
 - To what extent does the law provide the charter with conditions for success?
 - To what extent does the law contain charter law failure traps?
2. Determine whether your district can overcome negative aspects of your state's charter law (if any) for schools chartered by your district. Note how.
3. Decide whether contracting individually with external providers is preferable to using your state's charter laws to start fresh in your district's failing school(s).

| Charter Law Conditions for Success | Weaknesses: Our Law Does Not Meet This Condition | We Can Overcome This Weakness (if any) by... |
|--|---|---|
| Charter schools enjoy legally protected autonomy with regard to key operations. | | |
| Charter schools receive a fair share of per-pupil operating funding. | | |
| Law makes it feasible for authorizer to close failing charter schools. | | |
| Schools have access to charter school start-up funds (e.g., federal Charter School Program funding). | | |

| Charter Law Failure Traps | Weaknesses: Our Law Falls into This Trap | We Can Overcome This Weakness (if any) by... |
|---|---|---|
| The state or district is at or near a cap on the number of charter schools or students. | | |
| State law does not allow districts to authorize charter schools without state approval, and there is no feasible alternative authorizer. | | |
| State law would treat a restructuring school as a conversion charter school, a designation often requiring staff and parent approval for chartering; this may delay or prevent success. | | |
| State law requires case-by-case granting of waivers from regulation; waivers are hard to get. | | |
| Open enrollment or lottery requirements would prevent a school from giving preference to current students. | | |
| Collective bargaining agreements apply to district-authorized charters without changes needed for success by low-performing students (e.g., school day length, hiring criteria). | | |

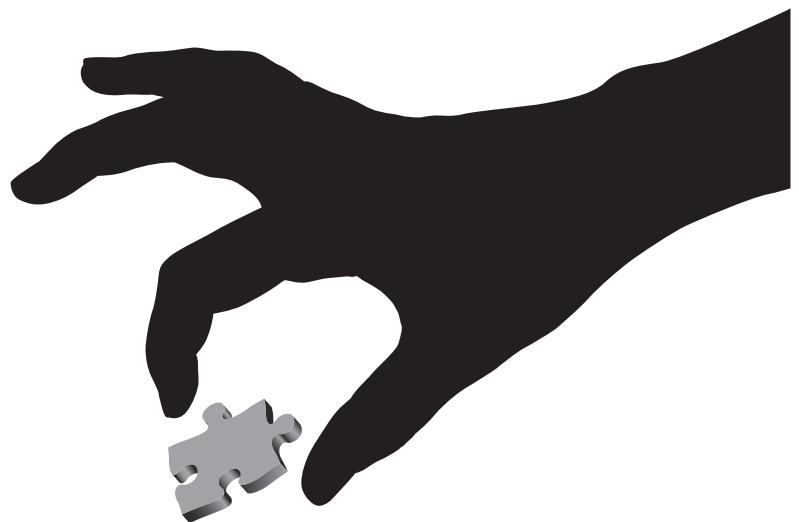
Chartering Contracting is preferable for schools authorized/governed by our district



Proposed Restructuring Strategies

| School Name | Restructuring Strategy Recommended | Major Reasons | Major Next Steps | Strategies for Presenting to the School Board |
|-------------|------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Chapter 9



Step 3: Implementing the Plan

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| Setting Implementation Goals | 101 |
| Addressing Implementation Roadblocks as Needed | 102 |
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Step 3: Implementing the Plan

Once restructuring options are chosen for each school and approved by the school board, the district restructuring team becomes responsible for seeing implementation through. This is a major part of the district's emerging governance role in an environment where low performance among disadvantaged students is no longer acceptable or considered inevitable.

Step 3 includes the following tasks:

- Engaging outside expertise for restructuring implementation as needed
- Setting implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines
- Addressing implementation roadblocks as needed
- Utilizing existing resources to implement each restructuring strategy well

This guide is not a manual for implementation; however, resources are cited to help with full implementation of each restructuring strategy.

Engaging Outside Expertise as Needed

Many districts will find it helpful to engage one or more outsiders familiar with the various restructuring options. If you utilized experts during the decision-making process, those or others focused on each restructuring strategy can help your district avoid pitfalls and build on successes of prior efforts elsewhere.

Setting Implementation Goals

Regardless of the strategies chosen, a critical step for district restructuring teams at this juncture is to articulate school performance goals on a relatively short, predefined time frame. As you set improvement and achievement goals for each school, you should clarify the measures for each goal. This should be a matter of first importance, as successful contracting, chartering, and turnarounds of low-performing schools all require clear learning performance goals (with measures) and time frames for interim improvement.

The ultimate achievement goals should be the same for all district schools. However, you may set interim improvement goals to recognize substantial improvements that are likely to lead to success within a few years. Do not settle for increases of 5 or 10 percentage points; other restructured schools have done far better and yours should, too.

Be sure that your criteria for success include at least the following:

- Significant improvement by students previously failing in core subjects
- Maintenance or improvement in learning by previously successful students
- Narrowing of achievement gaps by raising the bottom, not by lowering the top

An experienced restructuring consultant or evaluator can help you articulate these important details, which will feed directly into your agreements with turnaround leaders, charter providers, and contract school providers.

Addressing Implementation Roadblocks as Needed

Even after carefully assessing conditions in your district and each failing school, some districts may experience roadblocks to change. The *What Works When* Education Leaders' Summaries in the Appendix will help you anticipate many of those roadblocks.

Problems likely to arise after selecting change strategies include:

- **Chartering and contracting: Too few strong providers available.** Districts that choose to authorize charter or contract schools may find that too few high-quality providers are available. Revisiting strategies for increasing provider supply may be necessary. Districts that want to increase local capacity to start new schools outside of district management should form a long-term plan to recruit and train entrepreneurial school leaders and teams to govern such schools. Districts also may plan ahead to meet the conditions required by very successful charter and contract school providers seeking to replicate their successful approaches. These actions will not address the short-term shortage of providers, but they can help build a pipeline that in time will supply your district with enough high-quality providers to handle your restructuring work.
- **Turnarounds: Misfit leaders chosen.** Districts may have fallen into the trap of assuming that leaders of existing strong district schools are the best choices to lead turnaround schools. A strong urge to utilize current district staff increases the probability of choosing misfit turnaround leaders. Districts that want to attempt turnarounds but that do not have enough of the right kind of leaders should form a long-term plan to recruit and train turnaround leaders. The resources in the next section provide one place to start.

Utilizing Existing Resources

Following are selected resources.

Chartering

Reports

Arkin, M. D., & Kowal, J. M. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Reopening as a charter school*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Reopening as a Charter School*, is focused on reopening an existing school as a charter school. It examines what is known about when chartering may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

• • • •

Lake, R. J., & Hill, P. T. (Eds.) (2005). *Hopes, fears, and reality: A balanced look at American charter schools*. Seattle: University of Washington, Center for Reinventing Public Education, National Charter School Research Project. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf

This report provides new data on charter schools based on surveys of state agencies and state charter associations. The report addresses charter school movement increase or decline and charter versus public school population of disadvantaged students.

• • • •

National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2007). *Principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing*. Chicago: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/final_PS_Brochure.pdf

This report reflects on lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. (2004). *Innovations in education: Successful charter schools*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.uscharterschools.org/resources/scs/report.pdf>

This report provides a glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning.

Websites

Education Commission of the States (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>)

Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy To Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is a page on the website with links to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

• • • •

U. S. Charter Schools (<http://www.uscharterschools.org>)

This site features a searchable database of charter school research, links to state charter laws, and other resources.

Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff

Reports

Kowal, J. M., & Hassel, E. A. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Turnarounds with new leaders and staff*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/Knowledgelssues4Turnaround.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Turnarounds with New Leaders and Staff*, focuses on the option of replacing school leaders and staff. It examines what is known about when turnarounds may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

Websites

Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (www.centerforcsri.org)

The Center has numerous publications on implementation of NCLB.

• • • •

School Turnaround (<http://schoolturnaround.org>)

School Turnaround is a national nonprofit organization that trains principals to adopt the methods of successful school turnaround leaders to produce dramatic learning improvements. Consultants who have turned around school performance train and coach principals. This organization was founded by a successful school turnaround leader.

• • • •

Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/vdoe/>)

This is a state-level program for identifying and training school turnaround specialists. Principals with high potential for turnaround leadership are identified, trained, and coached to lead school turnarounds. The program is a collaboration between the University of Virginia's education and graduate business schools.

Contracting

Reports

Hannaway, J. (1999). *Contracting as a mechanism for managing educational services*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from http://www.worldbank.org.cn/english/content/Jane_Hannaway.pdf

This policy brief discusses the contract and oversight process for educational management organizations.

• • • •

Kowal, J. M., & Arkin, M. D. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Contracting with external education management providers*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/Knowledgelssues3Contracting.pdf>

School Restructuring—What Works When

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. The paper, *Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, focuses on contracting with an outside entity to operate the school. It examines what is known about when contracting may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. A summary of the paper is found in the Appendix of this guide.

• • • •

National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2007). *Principles and standards for quality charter school authorizing*. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/final_PS_Brochure.pdf

This report reflects on lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The Principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The Standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility.

Websites

Education Commission of the States (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>)

Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is a page on the website with links to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

• • • •

Education Service Provider Clearinghouse (<http://www.charterauthorizers.org/esp/>)

This is a one-stop source of objective information about education service providers serving charter schools nationwide. Among other useful data, the site contains information about 22 educational management organizations.

State Takeovers

Reports

Steiner, L. (2005). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? State takeovers of individual schools*. Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates, Center

for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssuesIStateTakeovers.pdf>

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, focuses on turning the operation of the school over to the state. It examines what is known about the use of state takeovers as a way to improve failing schools and issues that state policymakers should address when considering state takeovers as a policy option. A summary of the report is available in the Appendix of this guide.

• • • •

Wong, K. K., & Shen, F. X. (2001, August-September). *Does school district takeover work? Assessing the effectiveness of city and state takeover as a school reform strategy*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED468271&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED468271

The paper examines the potential for city and state takeovers to turn around low-performing schools. The study employs a national multilevel database to empirically analyze takeover reform.

• • • •

Ziebarth, T. (2002). *State takeovers and reconstitution*. Denver: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/13/59/1359.htm>

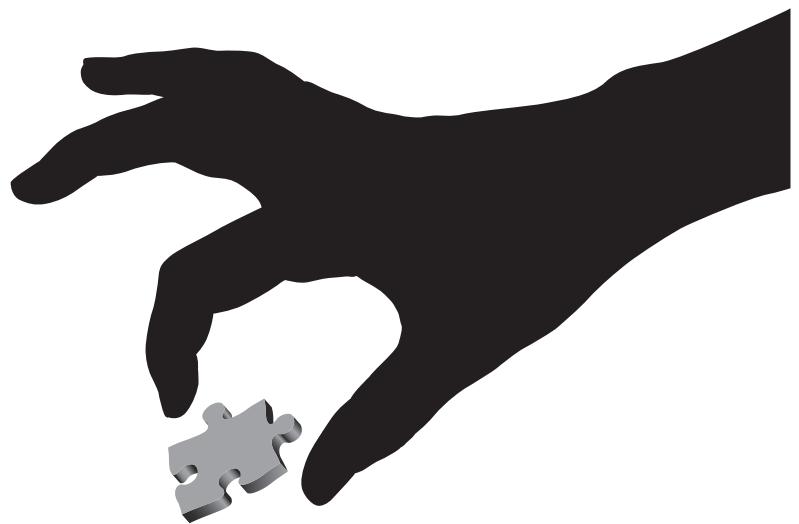
The policy brief presents overviews, discusses opposing perspectives, examines effects, and offers questions for state policymakers about state takeovers of districts and schools and reconstitutions of schools.

Website

Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (www.centerforcsri.org)

The Center has numerous publications on implementation of NCLB.

Chapter 10



Step 4: Evaluating, Improving, and Acting on Results

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Step 4: Evaluating, Improving, and Acting on Results

Once you have implemented restructuring with one or more schools, the district monitors school improvement and takes action accordingly. Outside experts in evaluation or restructuring may be called in to help you evaluate, using both your outcome goals and the key process elements needed for success. Following is a brief list of actions needed to improve future restructuring efforts.

Planning for Evaluation

An essential action is planning for evaluating both results and process steps that might explain school performance strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation planning is best when done at the inception of a change (e.g., when requesting proposals from charter providers and school management organizations; when hiring and placing turnaround leaders in schools).

Knowing what the district expects to achieve in a school change is critical for clarity with those who will be leading change in each specific school. Use the student performance goals you established during the implementation step to evaluate results. You may use the restructuring checklists that outline the essential elements of each restructuring option (the tools are found on pages 27, 37, and 47), or other resources about each restructuring strategy, to get at process evaluation.

Clarifying Accountability

Another essential action is clarifying who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data about restructured school performance and for facilitating next-step decisions. This ensures that data are collected in a useful format for decision making. Ask questions such as:

- Who will collect the performance data for each school? How?
- What kind of format will be used to summarize findings?
- Who will get the findings? When?
- Who will make next-step decisions about whether restructuring is having a positive enough effect in each school? When?

Continued district leadership is essential both for collecting data and making decisions based on findings.

Using Evaluation Findings

Using evaluation findings to build on strengths and consider restructuring again in schools that have not improved substantially is another task. Some restructured schools will realize great success—and you can seek to replicate that success in future decisions as well as to work toward continued improvement in these schools.

Although major changes are essential to create major improvements, even carefully planned restructuring does not always work. In some cases, the district will not be able to create the environment to enable and sustain the turnaround. In other cases, charter and contract providers or turnaround leaders will not achieve the desired improvements. Some districts may find that they were not tough enough in selecting charter operators, contract providers, or turnaround leaders. It may take multiple efforts—a change of turnaround leaders, or a new contractor or charter provider—to achieve dramatic improvement.

You also can use evaluation findings to help make future restructuring decisions. When restructuring performance is exceptional, use this experience to inform future decisions. If your district has had great success with a strategy, do more of it in the future.

For example, if turnarounds have been far more successful than contracted or chartered schools authorized by your district, then turnarounds may be a better strategy for future restructuring in your district. Or if your district has found contracted relationships more successful than

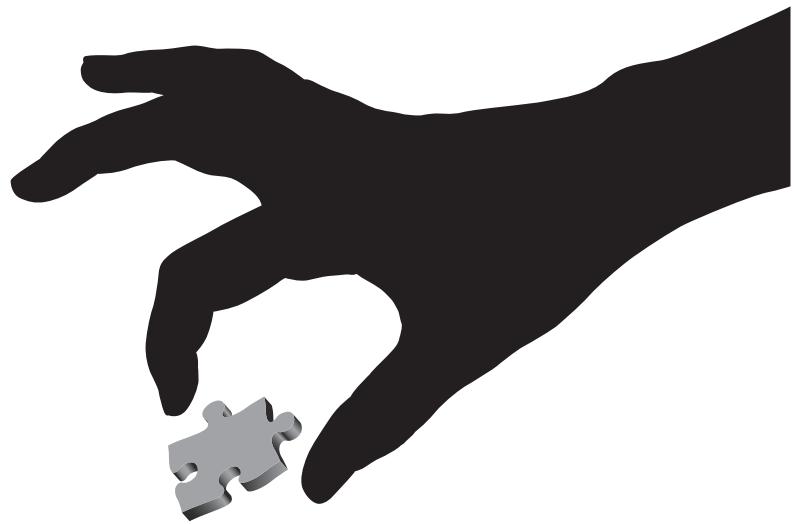
allowing district-managed turnaround leaders freedom to make big changes in failing schools, then consider more chartering and contracting in the future.

Making a Long-Term Commitment to Restructuring

Restructuring with changes in governance and leadership can be an effective method for making dramatic, rapid improvements. But not every restructuring effort will succeed the first time. Remember that restructuring is not a project; it is a long-term commitment. Even in a hopeful future when there no longer are large numbers of disadvantaged students who are not learning enough, the best districts may continue to restructure schools regularly.

Learning and knowledge are moving targets with ever higher bars. What is acceptable school performance now likely will no longer be good enough in the future as different knowledge and more complex thinking become necessary for student success.

Appendix



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Education Leaders' Summaries

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Education Leaders' Summary

Reopening as a Charter School

Introduction to the What Works When Series

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few students learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of students meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: Reopening as a Charter*

School. The paper examines the first restructuring option. The complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>.

Additional papers in the series explore turnarounds with new leaders and staff, contracting, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

Methodology

Reopening as a Charter School was written using the following sources:

- Review of research literature about closing low-performing district schools and reopening them as charter schools (also called starting fresh and charter conversions)
- Review of research on charter schools that open without closing a school (start-ups)
- Interviews with researchers and practitioners about reopening district schools as charter schools and about charter school start-ups
- Review of research about districts that close and reopen schools in noncharter fashion
- Review of cross-industry research on large organizations that effect internal start-ups
- Cross-industry research comparing high-performing start-up leaders to average ones and similar research about top principals in existing schools

What Are Charter Schools and Chartering Under NCLB?

Charter schools generally are autonomous public schools that receive a contract called a charter from a public entity such as a local school board, a public university, or a state board of education. The entity giving the charter is called an authorizer. Charter schools are schools of choice, usually open to all students and in all cases tuition-free. Each charter describes the school's goals, organization, funding, and autonomy. Charter schools eventually are expected to close if goals are not met, and closure terms are included in the charters. Most charter schools are nonprofits, but some are for-profit organizations.

The majority of charter schools in the United States are entirely new schools, formed by a group of parents, teachers, or community members who start the school from scratch. An increasing number of these are part of charter management organizations (CMOs). In contrast, the chartering option under NCLB allows a district to close a district school and reopen it with a clean slate under a charter agreement. Chartering is distinct from closing and reopening a school that is still managed by the district and is distinct from contracting, which is done without a state charter law prescribing contract terms.

What Is the Experience With Chartering?

Charter Facts

- The first charter school legislation in the United States was passed in 1991.

- Forty states and the District of Columbia have legislation authorizing charter schools.
- By fall 2005, there were roughly 3,600 charter schools serving more than one million students.
- Nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of minority (58 percent versus 45 percent) and low-income (52 percent versus 40 percent) students than other public schools in the same states, but they are similar in makeup to the districts where they are located. Charter schools are disproportionately located in urban areas.

Charter Student Learning Results

Global comparisons to other students statewide—the most common way scores are reported and analyzed—are limited in meaning because of income and racial disparities between charter schools and host states. Not surprisingly then, statewide percent-at-grade-level comparisons at single points in time often show charter students lagging. Studies comparing charter students to more directly comparable schools often show a higher percentage of charter students making grade level than district students on average. Studies analyzing change over time—focusing on the progress students or schools are making rather than the relative advantages students bring to school—tend to show charter schools and charter students making faster progress on average than district schools. However, average comparisons of any kind can mislead. Some charter schools are very high performing, while others are low performing. Thus, one role of districts that charter is to create more schools at the top and continually eliminate schools at the bottom.

Charter Start-ups, District School Conversions, and Noncharter Restarts

The majority of charter schools are start-ups unrelated to district schools. Very few are conversion or starting fresh charters—schools that replace low-performing district schools. Start-fresh conversions have been or are being undertaken in some states and districts. In most cases, it is too soon to assess results.

Other districts have begun closing and reopening schools in noncharter fashion, providing more freedom and accountability in a manner similar to that granted through charters. Prominent examples include Chicago and New York City.

What Is Known From These Experiences? Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of chartering. These have been organized into five categories. Most influential among these are the charter authorizing role at the system level, school governance, and school leadership. The district, as authorizer, has enormous control over all three of these as well as other success factors. Designing these elements right from the start is crucial because changing later is hard.

System-level governance. Management and leadership of the entire chartering effort within a whole district are critical, with the district acting as the process organizer and authorizer of reopened schools. The broad experience of charter authorizers nationally, not just district authorizers, provides a base of information about what works. Several recent research

studies suggest that the following four factors contribute to authorizing success.

- **Rigorous selection process.** The district's goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success as quickly as possible with students who have not succeeded in the district schools being closed. Doing this requires a selection process that is as follows:
 - *Fair:* The submission process must have clear, realistic, well-communicated timelines, format and content specifications, process steps, and evaluation criteria.
 - *Rigorous:* Each applicant must demonstrate a clear and compelling mission, an educational program based on research about school quality, a solid business plan, effective governance and management systems, and evidence that the applicant can act on the plan.
 - *Designed to make good charter decisions:* The district must thoroughly evaluate each application using reviewers with educational, organizational, legal, and financial expertise.
- **Adequate resources.** Authorizing is labor intensive. Studies show that authorizers who devote staff and other resources exclusively to this function perform better.
- **Community engagement.** Charter schools can be controversial. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders while also pressing forward with change are the most successful.
- **Working environment.** Strong authorizers balance accountability for results, freedom of schools to do things differently, and adequate support when needed by each school.

Empirical research indicates that districts may have more difficulty than other authorizers devoting staff and resources to the authorizing function. Local district authorizers also are more vulnerable to political pressures. Two major national studies show that authorizers with broader geographic coverage use higher quality processes.

Environmental Factors. Several factors outside of a charter school's control can affect success, including the following:

- **Freedom to act.** Studies within education and across industries indicate that freedom to try approaches different from current practice is a large factor in the success of efforts to meet previously unmet needs. It is a misconception that charter status grants a school automatic autonomy; this differs from state to state. Districts considering charters to restructure low-performing schools will want to note whether state charter laws allow charter schools to use practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students, such as longer school days and control over staff hiring.
- **Accountability.** Monitoring and evaluating results is one key role of system-level governance, described earlier, that will affect charter school success. One key element of accountability is establishing clear expectations for measurable results during specified time periods. Another key element is ongoing assessment; teasing out achievement from progress and accurately comparing numbers in a mobile student population is challenging but critical for accountability that ensures charter performance.

- **Timetable.** The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law. Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results, according to research. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing providers who then need time to plan and organize each school. But too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much.
- **Additional support.** District authorizers must decide how much per-pupil funding, training, technical assistance, and facility assistance the district will provide to maximize charter school success.

School-level governance. In most of the cases, charter schools are governed by a board of trustees to whom the authorizer grants the charter. The board is accountable for school performance. The factors for success include the board's common commitment to the school's mission, the members' understanding of the charter goals, a clear way to measure performance against those goals, commitment to ultimate learning results, clarity of roles on the board, appropriate structure (size, composition, committees, officers), a board meeting process that focuses on strategy, sticking to governance not day-to-day school management, and a strong relationship with the school leader. A key role of the board is choosing the right school leader.

School leadership. No research yet clarifies the capabilities of successful start-up and charter school leaders. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent of performers to average ones has found strong similarities

among start-up leaders in very differing industries. Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and acting persistently), solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses), showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses), and influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals). Similar research shows that the highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals) and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals). Further research is needed to clarify what distinguishes the best charter school leaders. Districts should look for proven entrepreneurial capability in charter leaders and charter boards capable of managing this kind of talent.

Organizational factors. Although interviews suggest that preexisting staff should not be guaranteed jobs in the reopened school, staff need not all be new. A mix of preexisting and new staff may be optimal, but this will depend upon the specifics of the charter granted. All staff, old and new, must agree with and act on the school's mission. Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school

connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above. Additional factors cited in one analysis of successful charters include flexibility to meet the mission, committed staff with relevant skills, a caring environment for staff and students, and internal accountability.

What Further Research Is Needed to Understand District Chartering?

Further research is needed to compare high-performing charter schools both with less successful charters and high-performing district schools, to examine what works best in charter authorizing, and to refine understanding of successful charter school leaders.

Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Reopening as a Charter School*, is focused on reopening an existing school as a charter school. It examines what is known about when chartering may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues2Chartering.pdf>.
- *Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools* (2004) by the U.S. Department of Education provides a

glimpse into the inner workings of eight American charter schools whose freedom to experiment is raising the level of student learning. The full report is available at <http://www.uscharterschools.org/resources/scs/report.pdf>.

- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school authorizers. The principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.
- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>) to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.
- The *US Charter Schools* website (<http://www.uscharterschools.org>) features a searchable database of charter school research, links to state charter laws, and other resources.
- *Hopes, Fears, and Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*, edited by Robin J. Lake and Paul T. Hill for the National Charter School Research Project, provides new data on charter schools based on surveys of state agencies and state charter associations. The report addresses charter school movement increase or decline and charter versus public school population of disadvantaged students. The report is available at http://www.ncsrp.org/downloads/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf.

Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.

Based on the complete paper by Matthew D. Arkin and Julia M. Kowal. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. *What Works When* series manager and leadership section author: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, NC.

Education Leaders' Summary

Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff

Introduction to the What Works When Series

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few students learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of students meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders. This is a summary of the paper, *What Works When: Turnarounds With New Leaders and*

Staff. The paper examines the second restructuring option. The entire paper can be found at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues4Turnaround.pdf>.

Additional papers explore chartering, contracting, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

Methodology

Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff was written using the following sources:

- Review of research about school turnaround attempts with new leaders and new staff.
- Review of the substantial body of research about successful turnarounds in the private and public noneducation sectors. Instead of incremental improvements, this research examines speedy, bad-to-great turnarounds typically initiated under new leaders.
- Interviews with directors of the two known school turnaround leader training programs. These programs use the noneducation turnaround research as a major basis for program content, lending confidence that this literature is highly applicable to schools.
- Review of research about school leadership and turnaround leadership.
- Relevant research about other school restructuring approaches and incremental change.

What Is a Turnaround Under NCLB?

In this paper, the term turnaround is used to refer to district-managed replacement of a school leader and staff relevant to the school's failure. The term turnaround is adopted here because cross-industry literature uses this term to describe the phenomenon of speedy improvements—from bad to great—typically under new leaders. This forms the most relevant knowledge base for successful restructuring of low-performing schools through replacement of leaders and staff. In the past, replacement of staff and leaders in failing schools has been called reconstitution. Turnaround literature differs from the vast body of literature about organization change in general, which focuses on continuous, incremental improvement over longer time periods.

What Is the Experience With Turnarounds?

Noneducation Turnarounds

Hundreds of individual *for-profit* turnarounds have been studied and documented across industries. Researchers also have studied multiple business turnarounds to draw conclusions about common success factors. Historically, an estimated 70 percent of private turnaround efforts have failed, and this has fueled the research about when turnarounds are successful.

Far fewer *public and nonprofit* turnarounds have been documented and analyzed. However, there are documented accounts of successful turnarounds in the New York City police force, the City of Atlanta, and the U.S. Postal Service,

with some broader analysis of turnarounds in these sectors.

Public School Turnarounds

Approximately two thirds of the states have laws enabling districts or states to replace a school's leaders and staff, and several turnaround efforts were undertaken under state law before NCLB was enacted. Well-documented cases of school turnaround efforts include those in San Francisco, Chicago, Houston, and Prince George's County, Maryland. Some broader analysis of school reconstitutions is available as well. In some schools, turnaround efforts have increased order, stability, and parent and community involvement. Academic results, however, are mixed. Anecdotally, additional individual schools have effected turnarounds, but their efforts have not been well documented.

What Is Known From These Experiences?

Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of school turnarounds. These have been organized into the following four categories. The most important factor in a successful turnaround is having the right school leader. The right leader taking the right actions can overcome barriers that otherwise would prevent turnaround success. Successful turnarounds typically do not require broad-scale staff replacement.

Governance. This is management of the turnaround process at the district level. In a

turnaround, the district manages the school leader directly and maintains ultimate power. Research indicates that the four most important governance factors in turnarounds include the following:

- Choosing the right school turnaround leaders (addressed in Leadership section later)
- Providing timely support and aligned systems such as management and communication support, student learning data, correct funding allocation according to the school's population, and help removing ineffective staff from the school
- Allowing turnaround leaders freedom to implement necessary changes without permission, even when this leads to actions inconsistent with preexisting policy
- Establishing accountability for expected improvement within an accelerated time frame

The great bulk of research across sectors indicates that successful turnarounds typically occur without additional funding. However, more money may be helpful for recruiting top talent to lead and/or staff turnaround schools. Whatever support the district provides, experience suggests that it will need to be ongoing until improvements are sustained and solidified.

Environmental factors. *Parent and community support* and the *timeline for change* are two additional factors that influence turnaround success. Research indicates that during implementation of a turnaround, successful organizations often develop a campaign to gain support of the community. Successful turnarounds engage passionate stakeholders in ways that make

them part of the change rather than critical observers on the sidelines. Communicating a clear vision of a successful future as well as a stark dose of reality about current failure are both tactics in successful turnarounds. Achieving and publicizing speedy, targeted successes is essential to disempowering naysayers and emboldening those who support major change.

The timing of both turnaround planning and implementation is important. Experience indicates that more planning time is better. The sooner a district makes the decision to attempt a turnaround, the sooner a leader may be chosen and the more planning time the district and leader will have. During implementation, successful turnarounds across industries, including schools, consistently show fast, focused results on important, select measures. Successful turnaround schools typically show remarkable academic improvement within one year. However, completion of turnarounds in which results are sustained may take three to five years.

Leadership factors. Research indicates that the school leader is the essential ingredient in successful turnarounds. A large majority of successful turnarounds occur under a leader new to the organization. The leader must take the right actions and have turnaround leadership competencies.

Leader actions. The two major actions commonly taken by successful turnaround leaders include the following:

- Concentrating on a few very important changes with big, fast payoffs
- Acting to implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, even when they require deviations from district policies

Supporting actions taken by successful turnaround leaders include the following:

- Communicating a positive vision of future school results
- Collecting and personally analyzing school and student performance data
- Making an action plan based on data
- Helping staff personally “see and feel” the problems students face
- Getting key influencers within district and school to support major changes
- Measuring and reporting progress frequently and publicly
- Gathering staff team often and requiring all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open-air meetings
- Funneling time and money into tactics that get results; halting unsuccessful tactics
- Requiring all staff to change, not making this optional
- Silencing change naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes
- Acting in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success

Leader competencies. Successful turnaround leaders are broadly skilled. Preliminary findings indicate that they combine the behavioral competencies of entrepreneurs, middle managers, and incremental change leaders. Adapting Spencer and Spencer’s models from *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*¹ generates the following list of competencies:

- Driving for results: setting high goals, taking initiative, being relentlessly persistent

- Solving problems: using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems
- Showing confidence: exhibiting confidence, using failure to initiate problem solving
- Influence: influencing immediate action toward the school’s goals
- Teamwork and cooperation: getting input and keeping others informed
- Conceptual thinking: connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum
- Team leadership: assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform
- Organizational commitment: making personal sacrifices needed for school success
- Communicating a compelling vision: rousing staff to commit energy to the change

Researchers widely agree that all successful leaders working with previously low-performing students must understand research about effective schools and how it applies to students served. Districts selecting turnaround leaders also should look for a track record of initiating and implementing speedy changes amid many barriers to success.

Organizational factors. The following elements of school organization may affect success:

- **Staff replacement.** Research indicates that wholesale staff replacement is not necessary for a successful turnaround. However, during a successful turnaround some small portion of staff members typically is unable to make changes needed to improve student learning. The district needs to ensure

that these people may be removed from the school.

- **Culture change.** Successful turnarounds initially focus on specific actions needed for immediate results in target areas. Sustained improvement may require broader culture change. Common levers of culture change in schools include ongoing professional development and increased staff teamwork and communication.
- **School design.** Studies of high-performing schools, including those with previously low-performing students, show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above.

What Further Research Is Needed to Understand Turnarounds?

Further research is needed to refine understanding of how turnaround leaders differ from traditional principals, to help principals accurately identify staff members who are not effective in turnaround schools, and to document the process used in successful turnaround schools so that future schools will have easily grasped examples from which to learn.

Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *Turnarounds With New Leaders and Staff*, focuses on the option of replacing school leaders and staff. It examines what is known about when turnarounds may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is online at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues4Turnaround.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center Resources page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.
- School Turnaround is a national nonprofit organization that trains principals to adopt the methods of successful school turnaround leaders to produce dramatic learning improvements. Consultants who have turned around school performance train and coach principals. This organization was founded by a successful school turnaround leader. Information about this organization is available at <http://schoolturnaround.org>.
- The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program is a state-level program for identifying and training School Turnaround specialists. Principals with high potential for

turnaround leadership are identified, trained, and coached to lead school turnarounds. The program is a collaboration between the University of Virginia's education and graduate business schools. More information about the program and services offered outside the state is available at <http://www.darden.virginia.edu/vdoe/>.

Endnote

¹Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.

Based on the complete paper by Julia M. Kowal and Emily Ayscue Hassel. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. *What Works When* series manager: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, NC.

Education Leaders' Summary

Contracting With External Education Management Providers

Introduction to the What Works When Series

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few students learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of students meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- Chartering: closing and reopening as a public charter school
- Turnarounds: replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure
- Contracting: contracting with an outside entity to operate the school
- State Takeovers: turning the school operations over to the state educational agency
- Other: engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to

district leaders. This is a summary of the paper, *What Works When: Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, examining the third option. The complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues3Contracting.pdf>.

Additional papers explore chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and state takeovers. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

Methodology

Contracting With External Education Management Providers uses the following sources:

- Review of research literature about the use of contracting for whole-school management, including charter authorizing
- Interviews with researchers and practitioners about the use of contracting for whole-school management
- Review of research about schools' use of contracting for noneducation services
- Review of research about the use of contracting by public agencies outside of education
- Cross-industry research comparing high-performing start-up leaders to average ones and similar research about top principals in existing schools

What Is Contracting Under NCLB?

As used here, the term contracting refers to an agreement undertaken by the governing board of a public school district with an outside organization to deliver comprehensive educational and management services to a failing school. In the case of contracting under NCLB, the public school district retains ultimate authority and control through its ability to set the terms of the contract and terminate the agreement if the terms are not met.

Contracting is different from chartering, in which the contract is governed by state charter laws. In a noncharter contract, every aspect of the arrangement is negotiated. Contracting, for this purpose, also is different from contracts for individual school services such as cafeteria management, security as well as transportation, tutoring, or supplemental services for special needs students. Contracts for comprehensive educational and management services are a much more recent and less common development. While most early contractors were for-profit organizations, many nonprofits now provide whole-school management services. All whole-school contractors are called Education Management Organizations (EMOs) in this summary.

What Is the Experience With Contracting?

By the early 1990s, the average American city contracted out nearly 28 percent of its annual budget. Extensive research has been conducted on municipal service contracting. This research indicates that contracting saves money, but service improvement results are mixed.

Contracting in education, particularly for whole-school management, is more recent. Research about results is limited. Six years of survey research on for-profit EMOs by the University of Arizona indicates that in 2004–05 there were 59 EMOs nationally, managing 535 schools with about 239,766 students in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Currently, EMOs are increasing supplemental services, such as tutoring, rather than expanding whole-school management. Charter schools are a large and growing subset of contracting efforts. In 2004–05, the 59 for-profit EMOs managed 21.7 percent of all charter schools. Of the schools run by tracked EMOs, 86.3 percent are charter schools. The number of district schools under noncharter contract management has remained relatively stable to date. There were 77 district schools under management in 2004–05. EMOs typically serve low-income, urban, and minority students.

Recent experiences of four school districts that have used school management contracting have been extensively documented: Philadelphia; Baltimore; Chester Upland, Pennsylvania; and Hartford, Connecticut. In Philadelphia, 45 schools are run by EMOs charged with providing a curriculum and supervising the principals, but the district retains control over each school's budget, calendar, personnel policies, and facility. In Baltimore, nine schools were recently run by EMOs or in district-provider partnership arrangements. In both Baltimore and Philadelphia, the contracting has produced some success from which to learn. In Chester Upland, the state initiated contracting for management of 10 schools. The district opposed the contracting and fought to retain control of personnel, student recruitment, and accountability; the contentious process created diffuse responsibilities and has become an example of

how not to contract. In Hartford, the school board invited an EMO to manage the entire low-performing district. The negotiation process was contentious, and definitions of district and contractor responsibilities were vague; the contracts were terminated within two years. In all cases, EMOs were selected to address chronically low-performing schools. Overall, results are mixed. In some contract schools, students learn more than in comparable district-run schools; in others, students learn less. Some EMOs produce better results, and some contract arrangements produce better results.

What Is Known From These Experiences? Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Research and experience indicate that several factors influence the success or failure of school contracting. These have been organized into the following five categories. The most influential among these appear to be the governance of the contracting process at the system level, the contract terms, school governance by the contracted EMO, and school leadership. Districts that choose to contract have enormous control over all of these as well as other success factors.

System-level governance. Leadership and management of the entire contracting effort are critical, with the district acting as the process organizer, negotiator, and ongoing manager of contract arrangements. Experience with contracting and charter authorizing provides evidence about critical overarching factors that affect the success of contracting, including the selection process, management of the contracting process (see Environmental factors

later), engagement of the school community, and ongoing oversight of the EMO.

- **Selection process.** The district's goal is to attract and choose school providers that will achieve success quickly with students who have not succeeded in district schools. Doing this requires a selection process that is rigorous, transparent, and fair as follows:
 - *Rigor and rules:* Case studies of contracting experiences make clear that districts where leaders implement and follow formalized processes and thoroughly evaluate each application have the most success minimizing conflicts during and after the selection process. Not all contract applicants are as good as they seem on paper. Districts must closely evaluate providers' expertise, track records, and financial credentials.
 - *Transparency:* A selection process that encourages open communication between the district, the applicants, and the community can help diffuse community resistance and ensure that the EMO selected best matches the needs of the school and the community.
 - *Fairness:* Best practices documented include setting specific criteria for selection, recruiting diverse teams to review applications, and keeping the process open and competitive. Recruiting a large, high-quality pool of applicants often is the first step. The district's selection team must avoid playing favorites. Even the slightest appearance of favoritism can raise resistance to change in the community.

More selection success specifics based on well-documented charter school

experiences may be found in the summary of the companion paper on *Reopening as a Charter School*.

- **Community involvement.** The contracting process and first year of school operation are challenging, and district contracting efforts appear to be especially susceptible to disruption. Efforts that include passionate stakeholders, while also pressing forward with change, are the most successful and encounter less resistance that prevents success.
- **Ongoing oversight and accountability.** When the district contracts out school management, ultimate responsibility for school success remains with the district. The district must set expectations and then establish a process for monitoring school progress. Research on contracting and closely analogous charter school authorizing indicate that combining autonomy and accountability works best when there is the following:
 - **Clarity:** Resistance to contract schools is common among central office staff, even when preexisting district schools have failed for many years. Thus, one task of the governing body responsible for overseeing the contracting process is educating and creating buy-in among central office staff. Clarity also is critical in the written contract; this is necessary for effective oversight later. The most successful contracts—those easiest to implement and monitor successfully—establish clear performance measures to help determine whether the contractor has fulfilled obligations.

- **Capacity:** The most successful district contracting has been done when a dedicated group is created within the district to manage and implement contracting. Such a dedicated group can focus on communicating and creating clarity in the contracting and oversight processes.

Environmental factors. Several factors outside of a contracted school's control can affect success. These factors include a broad range of external supports, freedoms, and constraints, including the following:

- **Timetable.** The timeline for the restructuring options under NCLB is dictated by the terms of the law. Restructuring that is too speedy produces poor results, according to research. Time is needed for recruiting and choosing contractors, who then need time to plan and organize each school. But too much time can erode the sense of urgency and increase political obstacles. There is no precise time prescription. A summer is too little time, but well more than a year may be too much.
- **Contract terms.** Establishing the right contract terms is critical. In addition to specifying the funds that the district will pay the EMO, the contract should include the following:
 - **Freedom to act:** School autonomy is less ensured by contracting than by chartering. Research within education and across industries indicates that freedom to try approaches different from current practice is a large factor in the success of efforts to meet previously unmet needs. Districts can ensure school operational autonomy during

the contracting phase, but this takes commitment, as the natural tendency is for districts to seek continued district control over daily school functions. Districts will especially need to ensure that contract schools are not prevented from using practices proven to be critical for previously low-performing students, such as longer school days and selection of staff committed to the school's approach.

- **Accountability:** Establishing performance criteria and clarifying the process for monitoring and evaluating results over specified time periods are key to contract success. Research indicates that the best contracts include a performance-based relationship, a timeline for improvement as well as results, public reporting of results, consequences, and fiscal incentives such as EMO compensation based on results.
- **Clear delegation of responsibilities:** A large barrier to success in contracted schools has been lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of the EMO and district. Lack of clarity diffuses responsibility and leads to conflicts that can be expensive and distracting from the educational work of the school.

District support. A contracted school may depend on district staff and resources for a variety of services. Facilities maintenance is one common type of support that districts often provide to EMOs, but there can be many varieties. The requirements and guidelines for district support should be included in the contract to avoid later conflict and recriminations.

School-level governance. Different EMOs have differing governance models for overseeing the multiple schools they manage. Research has not clarified characteristics that separate effective and ineffective EMO school governance models in contracting. Instead, most research suggests that EMOs should be selected based on the specific needs of the school and the characteristics discussed in other sections. Common ways in which EMO governance differs are design specificity and degree of management control over individual schools.

School leadership. Each contract school is essentially a start-up within a larger organization, the EMO. No research yet clarifies the capabilities of successful start-up or contract school leaders. Cross-industry research comparing the top 10 percent of performers to average ones has found strong similarities among start-up leaders in very differing industries. Common behaviors or competencies shown by the top performers include driving for results (setting high goals, taking initiative, and acting persistently), solving problems (using data to identify and tackle weaknesses), showing confidence (staying positive in words and actions, not making excuses), and influencing others (using relationships to foster immediate action toward goals). Similar research showed that the highest performing principals also demonstrate more conceptual thinking (e.g., linking school mission to the curriculum), team leadership (motivating the team to work toward common goals), and organizational commitment (making personal sacrifices to meet school goals). Further research is needed to clarify what distinguishes the best contract school leaders. Districts should look for EMOs capable of recruiting and managing leaders with entrepreneurial competencies.

Organizational factors. One controversial aspect of contract schools is the impact on unionized district staff. Collective bargaining contracts often conflict with critical practices in an EMO's model and with practices proven to work with previously low-performing students, such as selection only of staff who agree with the EMO's approach and longer school days. Districts choosing this option and keeping union staff will need to ensure that union contract waivers are available to allow practices crucial to student success. In addition, studies of high-performing schools—including those with previously low-performing students—show common school design elements. In brief, these include a clear mission guiding daily activities, high unyielding expectations that all students will learn, frequent monitoring of students' progress, responsive approaches for struggling students, staying current on instructional research, uninterrupted and adequate time on core subjects to ensure learning, a safe and orderly environment, a strong home-school connection, and strong leadership that ensures all of the above.

What Further Research Is Needed to Understand Contracting?

Further research is needed to better understand effective contracting processes, factors that determine the success of contracting at the school level, characteristics of EMOs that lead to effective contract schools, and leadership traits and actions that determine success in contract schools.

Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *What Works When: Contracting With External Education Management Providers*, focuses on contracting with an outside entity to operate the school. It examines what is known about when contracting may work for districts grappling with individual low-performing schools. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues3Contracting.pdf>.
- *Contracting as a Mechanism for Managing Educational Services* (1999) is a Consortium for Policy Research in Education policy brief by Jane Hannaway that discusses the contract and oversight process for educational management organizations. It is available at <http://www.cpre.org/Publications/rb28.pdf>.
- *The Education Service Provider Clearinghouse* (<http://www charterauthorizers.org/esp/>) is a one-stop source of objective information about education service providers serving charter schools nationwide. Among other useful data, the site contains information about 22 educational management organizations.
- *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* (2005) by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers reflects lessons learned by experienced charter school

authorizers. The principles articulate a set of beliefs about quality charter school authorizing. The standards identify core authorizer responsibilities and describe how the principles are upheld within each responsibility. The complete document is available at <http://www.charterauthorizers.org/files/nacsa/BECSA/Quality.pdf>.

- *Helping States Use Chartering as a Strategy to Meet the Demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001)* by Education Commission of the States is a website with links (<http://www.ecs.org/html/project.asp?projectID=59>)

to numerous resources, including several relevant case studies by Lauren Morando Rhim about restructuring schools.

Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.

Based on the complete paper by Julia M. Kowal and Matthew D. Arkin. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. *What Works When* series manager and leadership section author: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, NC.

Education Leaders' Summary

State Takeovers of Individual Schools

Introduction to the What Works When Series

With the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001, the federal government revised the existing federal accountability framework. State and district leaders, many of whom have long been concerned about schools where too few students learn, now have additional impetus to attempt more drastic reforms. In particular, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress in the percentage of students meeting grade level standards for five consecutive years must engage in restructuring to improve student learning. NCLB restructuring options include the following:

- **Chartering:** closing and reopening as a public charter school
- **Turnarounds:** replacing school staff, including the principal, relevant to the failure
- **Contracting:** contracting with an outside entity to operate the school
- **State Takeovers:** turning the school operations over to the state educational agency
- **Other:** engaging in another form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms

The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances the first four options improve student learning. These options are relatively drastic and unfamiliar to district leaders.

This is a summary of the paper *What Works When: State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, examining the fourth option. The complete paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>.

Additional papers in the series explore chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and contracting. *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders* helps states and districts choose among the options for each school.

Methodology

There are no examples to date of districts that have voluntarily turned over individual schools to a state. Thus, the following analogous sources were used to understand when this option might work:

- Review of research about “hostile” takeovers of both individual schools and whole districts by mayors and states
- Review of research about the effectiveness of new state-level accountability measures
- Review of evidence about state capacity to improve low-performing schools by providing technical assistance
- Review of research about charter school authorizing, analogous because authorizers govern schools in similar ways to a state taking over an individual school
- Interviews with state personnel and researchers familiar with state takeovers

What Are State Takeovers Under NCLB?

As envisioned under NCLB, a “friendly” takeover in which the district invites the state to take over and manage a persistently low-performing school differs from the more typical “hostile” school and district takeovers that some states have undertaken in recent years. At this point, only a small handful of states have initiated and plan to continue initiating “hostile” school takeovers for academic reasons, but that number may grow. NCLB does not explicitly address what the state should do after taking over a school. Presumably, state officials would then select one of the other restructuring options and manage the ensuing process. This paper does not explore these options in detail because they are addressed in other papers in this series. Instead, this paper focuses on the process of state takeover itself.

What Experience Have States Had With Takeovers and Related Initiatives?

The lack of voluntary state takeovers indicates that giving up control—even of failing schools—may not appeal to many districts. Leaders of districts and states considering this option will find more about why and when a district and state might find this option mutually agreeable in *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When? A Guide for Education Leaders*.

“Hostile” Takeovers of Individual Schools by a State

In 2003, 23 states had the legal right to take over schools, but only five of these states (Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) have chosen to exercise this right. After taking over schools, states have used a combination of technical assistance, contracting, chartering, and turnaround attempts with new leaders and staff (also called reconstitutions). In Alabama, which provided two staff per school to offer technical assistance, two of six schools sustained significant progress. In Maryland, which contracted out school management, three of four schools demonstrated learning progress. In Louisiana, the state selected four charter applicants to run a total of seven schools (although 26 were identified for takeover); as of this writing, it is too early to comment on learning results. Massachusetts appointed a new principal and hired a team of consultants to work with the staff of one school; as of this writing, it is too early to comment on learning results. Rhode Island created a detailed restructuring plan and appointed a special master to oversee the restructuring of one school. Fifty teachers and three administrators were replaced; it is too early to comment on learning results.

Takeovers of Whole Districts by Mayors and States

Since 1988, 20 states have taken over at least 55 local districts. Mayors have played a role as well. These takeovers have been analyzed and offer emerging help for states asked by districts to take over individual schools.

What Is Known From These Experiences? Key Success Factors and Key Challenges

Research suggests a number of factors that might influence the success or failure of this option, most importantly the state's capacity to govern the process and provide significant help to low-performing schools. The factors are organized into three broad areas.

System-level governance. Taking over individual schools at the request of a district would be a new role for virtually every state that considered it. In order to take on this role, the reviewed research suggests that states would need to design a new governance structure to oversee and implement the process. Case studies of district takeovers, for example, indicate that at the top of the governance system there would need to be an entity that has oversight responsibility. Similar to a board of directors in a corporate structure, the oversight body is a decision-making entity charged with planning the effort and with selecting, monitoring and evaluating the intervention methods. (The companion *What Works When* papers on chartering, turnarounds with new leaders and staff, and contracting examine what is known about each intervention method prescribed by NCLB.) Research indicates that these governing bodies may be more effective if they are as follows:

- Representative of the stakeholders in the school and community
- Independent of local interests in the district
- Knowledgeable about NCLB interventions and improvement in low-performing schools

- Allowed enough planning time (a few months during the summer are not enough)
- Tough enough to withstand political heat in pursuit of better schools
- Sensitive to local concerns and willing to listen and collaborate with cooperative groups

In addition to appointing an oversight body, each state that has experience with district and school takeovers also has created an office that supports the oversight body. This office assumes responsibility for the day-to-day work associated with running the takeover process. Research indicates that many states lack capacity and funding to provide this kind of working group. Research on charter authorizers also indicates that state-level activity of this kind is more effective than housing such a working group within a district. Staff members must be capable of managing a complex process and committed to the overall goals of the takeover. Being fair, transparent with accountability data, and funded to have adequate staff are important for this function.

School-level governance. All restructuring methods require specific oversight of each school and school leader. A key role of the system-level governance groups would be to ensure that restructuring includes selection of a group to oversee each individual school, also called school-level governance. If a state maintains direct control of a school, as it would when providing an intervention team or appointing a new principal, the state would need to govern each school directly. This may limit the number of schools that a state can effectively take over. If a state chooses to restructure the schools by chartering or contracting, then the charter and contract providers would be responsible

for school governance. Research on charter authorizers indicates school-level governance groups should match the needs of each school population and community.

Environmental factors. Three other factors affect takeover success, as follows:

- **Accountability.** This includes establishing a system for monitoring and evaluating school results. Elements are setting school performance expectations, determining how progress will be measured, and determining when the school would be released from state oversight. The complete paper offers more guidance about each of these elements.
- **Additional support.** There is limited research about how much and what type of support works. Research indicates that states are often limited in how much instructional support they can offer due to lack of funding for staff and inadequate instructional knowledge.
- **Freedom to act.** When typical strategies have not worked, school leaders may need the freedom to try alternative approaches to staffing, school year length, school day length, teacher pay, allocation of money in the school, curriculum, and student attendance policies. State policies or collective bargaining agreements may limit the freedom that states can grant even in a voluntary takeover.

What Further Research Is Needed to Understand State Takeovers?

Many questions remain about this option, and further research should analyze emerging cases

of state takeovers carefully. First, under what specific conditions should district and state policymakers consider state takeovers of individual schools? Would an oversight body that is independent of the state educational agency be more or less effective than an office housed in the state agency? What level and type of financial and staffing resources are necessary? How many schools can an office support with a given level of capacity? What specific capacities does this office need? What level of support and freedom to act do school intervention teams need to be successful?

Resources

Key resources for states and districts interested in this option include the following:

- The *What Works When* series is designed to help district leaders understand what is known about when and under what circumstances each of the NCLB restructuring options works to improve student learning, as well as what change is the right change for each school. This paper, *State Takeovers of Individual Schools*, focuses on turning the operation of the school over to the state. It examines what is known about the use of state takeovers as a way to improve failing schools and issues that state policymakers should address when considering state takeovers as a policy option. The paper is available at <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>.
- NCLB Implementation Center Resources page (<http://www.learningpt.org/nclb/center/resources.php?website=nclb>) provides several Learning Point Associates publications

and websites on No Child Left Behind school improvement.

- Presented at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, *Does School District Takeover Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of City and State Takeover as a School Reform Strategy* is a paper by Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen that examines the potential for city and state takeovers to turn around low-performing schools. The study employs a national multilevel database to empirically analyze takeover reform. It is archived at http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/27/af/8e.pdf.
- The Education Commission of the States accountability policy brief by

Todd Ziebarth, *State Takeovers and Reconstitution*, presents overviews, discusses opposing perspectives, examines effects, and offers questions for state policymakers about state takeovers of districts and schools and reconstitutions of schools. The brief is available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/13/59/1359.htm>.

Prepared by Public Impact for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. Based on the complete paper by Lucy M. Steiner. Research assistance by Julia M. Kowal. Edited by Bryan C. Hassel, Ph.D. *What Works When* series manager: Emily Ayscue Hassel. Public Impact is an education policy and management consulting firm in Chapel Hill, NC.

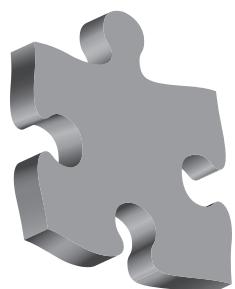


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